

Young British South Asian Muslim Women: Identities and Marriage

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Samia Mohee, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Young British South Asian Muslim women: Identities and Marriage

This thesis focuses on young and educated British South Asian Muslim women, and their negotiations of gendered identities and marriage in multicultural Britain. I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with Muslim women from northern England so as to explore how educational and employment experiences are altering women's gender identities and consequently, their understandings of marriage. Firstly, I look at how Muslim women develop 'alternative' identities as they navigate 'Islamic' and 'British' ideals. I analyse whether higher education and paid employment influence women's perspectives in constructing 'new' identities as they explore boundaries. My analysis is embedded within theoretical frameworks encompassing racialised, politicised and gendered discourses on Muslim identities in the UK. In essence, I concentrate on how women manage Muslimness as they evolve in their socio-political contexts. Secondly, I focus on how marriage is perceived by British South Asian Muslim women. The debates revolve around the gendered expectations women face from their communities; for instance, women navigate 'choice' and 'agency' in cultural practices such as arranged marriages. Furthermore, marriage, as an institution, remains a 'religious duty' in Islam. I raise questions about how Muslim women frame marriage as they generate new understandings of marriage through their negotiations of the 'nikah' and the civil registry (secular state law). Throughout these thematic discussions, the tensions engendered by the dichotomy 'religion' v/s 'culture' remain evident as Muslim women navigate contextual identities. Cultural gendered 'traditions' expected from their families are re-worked as they delay marriage so as to gain degrees and secure careers. Clearly, women are deconstructing stereotypical notions of 'Muslimness' as fixed categories so as to express individual definitions of meanings of British Muslimness. The prioritising of an Islamic identity over other identities (ethnic, citizenship and national) is evident. However, with education, women are contesting and interpreting Islam from new angles. They critique gendered practices such as 'talaq' and polygamy, concepts associated with Islamic marriage, in an attempt to embrace a discourse of equality within marriage, hence leading them to generate new gender identities.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is on young and educated British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of gender identities, and their understandings of marriage in Britain. I started this PhD project as an extension of my Master's research, which primarily focused on educated women's notions and experiences of 'choice' and 'consent' in marriage, and how these influenced their gendered identities. More specifically, I looked at arranged and forced marriages within the South Asian diaspora in Mauritius.¹ The aim of my Master's research was to establish how marriage, brought about through arrangements between families, impacted on educated Mauritian women's gendered identities within their ethnic and religious, as well as within the broader context of Mauritian society. My PhD thesis builds on this previous research as it also explores how educated Muslim women of South Asian diasporas in Britain negotiate marriage. More specifically, in this study, I evaluate the ways in which the new spaces of higher education and paid employment are leading young women to not only articulate new gender identities but to also generate new perceptions and expectations of marriage.

The starting hypothesis for my thesis is that as British South Asian Muslim women negotiate the spaces of higher education and employment, they develop new gender identities which shape their attitudes towards marriage as an institution, practice and act. Existing literature on British South Asian Muslim women and gender identities makes clear that there is a link between education and agency (Ahmad, 2001; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). Educated women express greater independence as they navigate life options such as educational paths and paid employment careers. This link between women's agency, education and employment remains significant in enabling women to generate new gender identities as educated and economically active young women within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain. However, the crucial issue I investigate in this thesis relates to the possible impacts this relationship creates upon women's other future life options such as marriage. This thesis reveals that even though women are increasingly opting for educational and employment careers, the institution of marriage still remains the preferred form of social/sexual relationship for South Asian Muslim women in Britain. The salient point to note is that while most of these educated young South Asian Muslim women are not actively resisting or refusing to consider marriage, many of them are attempting to re-work or re-interpret dominant ethno-religious understandings of marriage. This raises important questions for my study. Indeed, why is marriage not resisted more by educated and

independent young women? As women exercise newfound agency over their life options, how are the challenges faced by these young women leading them to actively navigate family and community expectations of marriage so as to generate new notions of South Asian Muslim womanhood within their communities? Consequently, how are their negotiations leading them to generate new gender identities?

The key research questions I address in this study are:

- (a) As young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate spaces like higher education and employment, are new gendered identities generated?
- (b) To what extent do British South Asian Muslim women develop new understandings of marriage through their experiences of higher education and employment?
- (c) How are such understandings shaping the negotiations of marriage expectations of British South Asian Muslim women?

My study draws on empirical research with thirty educated young British South Asian Muslim women to look at the possibilities or changes that education or paid employment might bring to women's notions and expectations of marriage. I build on the existing literature on British South Asian Muslim women's evolving gender identities, education and employment by not only examining how spaces like higher education and employment are encouraging women to postpone marriage options, but to also reflect on how their experiences of education and employment are altering their understandings of marriage. In this thesis, I therefore focus on marriage as the key site within which I investigate how young British South Asian Muslim women are juggling the challenges they face as new gendered identities are embraced. This analysis of women's navigations of marriage and gender identities is informed by feminist theoretical frameworks, where I suggest that postmodern and post-colonial feminist theory aid in the study of women's affirmation and articulation of new gender identities. In particular, I argue that concepts around performativity and difference enable us to understand young British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of their gender identities.

Existing research on young British South Asian women and marriage within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain shows that current policy debates around marriage and multiculturalism in Britain are dominated by the issue of arranged and forced marriages within these communities. The point of contention arising within the ongoing political discussions on South Asian marriages in the UK relates to the issue of 'choice' young South Asian women have within the marriage process, more specifically, how much choice and

independence do young women have as their families attempt to arrange their marriages? The crux of the matter remains: when is a match merely arranged, left to the young woman to independently decide whether to marry or not, and when is a marriage forced, leaving women with no choice but to 'agree' to marry? After increasingly dealing with cases where young women have been victims of forced marriages, the British government is enforcing new legislation so as to criminalise forced marriages in the UK (*BBC News*, June 2012). In my analysis of young women's negotiations of marriage, I reflect on the ways in which education and employment are leading young British South Asian Muslim women to formulate and assert new positionings as they engage with the cultural and social processes of the arranged marriage; how does the independence gained from educational and employment experiences leading them to develop new expectations of marriage and consequently, generate new gender identities as the degrees of choice and consent are negotiated within marriage?

In the following chapter (Chapter Two), I foreground the major theoretical debates framing my study. First, I focus on the educational and employment contexts of British South Asian Muslim women and argue that their schooling as well as higher educational experiences have enforced stereotypical notions and discourses of South Asian womanhood in Britain. As such, their gender identities are perceived as being fixed within particular racialised discourses around ethnicity, culture and religion (Brah, 1993; Bhopal, 1997; Basit, 1997; Afshar, 1994; Dwyer, 2000; Ahmad, 2001; Shain, 2003; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). These notions revolve around women rejecting educational careers post compulsory secondary education in the advent of marriage. Ultimately, young women are not viewed as potential participants within the public spaces of higher education and the labour market. I attempt to deconstruct such notions in demonstrating that strong motivational factors are increasingly leading women of diverse social classes and educational backgrounds to consider educational and employment careers prior to marriage. As British South Asian Muslim women explore the spaces of education and employment, they are resisting gendered cultural norms (through family navigations) and formulating new femininities as they re-work their gender identities through new understandings and expectations of marriage.

Second, I elaborate on the theoretical strands within feminist theory which I utilise to conceptualise my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of their gender identities. In particular, I reflect on the concept of 'difference' and gender identity politics, brought about by a critique of Eurocentric models of feminist theory by non-Western feminists. I reiterate how notions of 'race', ethnicity and culture must not be essentialised if women's experiences are to be understood. Indeed, the construction of ethnic

minority women's identities remains embedded within racialised discourses which inform women's narratives (Brah, 1993). I rely on Brah's (1996) concept of culture as 'reiterative performance' and Butler's (1990) notion of gender identity as 'performance' in my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiation and affirmation of their changing gendered identities. These concepts can be applied to my study in different ways. Firstly, they enable me to explore the possibilities young British South Asian Muslim women have for re-working their gendered identities. Secondly, they act as theoretical frameworks which recognise the discursive, material and geographical contexts within which these young women's gendered identities are negotiated.

Third, I focus on marriage as the crux within which British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of their gender identities occur. I contend that marriage and the family remain gendered organisations within which women contest and construct new gendered identities. As young women enter the new spaces of higher education and employment, they re-assess notions of marriage and the family unit; for instance, women develop strategies in balancing the options of delaying marriage (and family) for educational/work careers, as well as opting to work after marriage. For Muslims, marriage is also seen as a religious duty in Islam. I argue that educated Muslim women still view marriage as crucial to their ethnic and religious identities, even though alternatives to marriage (for example, cohabitation) are becoming more and more popular in Britain. As such, marriage acts as an important social institution aiding in the maintenance of ethno-religious identities, hence shaping British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities. For instance, through the customary cultural custom of arranged marriage, young women illustrate their navigations of marriage and the affirmation of new gender identities as they actively negotiate consent, agency and choice within marriage, thus demonstrating their changing perceptions and expectations of marriage. In also having to negotiate two intertwining legal frameworks – Islamic law and English law,² the definitions of marriage for these young women are re-worked, thereby allowing for the possibilities of redefining the institution of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities. Indeed, the status of talaq (Islamic divorce) and polygamy in British South Asian Muslim women's lives remain important areas of research as they indicate how women are engaging with such concepts as they navigate the Islamic marriage in Britain.

In Chapter Three, I reflect on the methodological approaches I utilised to carry out my research. I conducted my study in the Yorkshire and Lancashire areas as they are significant locations of British South Asian Muslim communities. As research strategy, I relied on snowballing as my main recruitment strategy and through personal contacts and student societies, I started the recruitment process on university campuses (Leeds, Bradford

and Manchester). I also contacted South Asian women's organisations in Leeds so as to network and make my study known; as such, I made new contacts which helped in recruiting research participants. I go on to outline the methodological tools (individual in-depth interviews and participant observation) I used for my research, thereby providing some reflections on the interview process and the benefits gained from including participant observation in my research strategy. Furthermore, I focus on the feminist methodologies that inform my study; in particular, I explain why I find feminist standpoint theory and the feminist politics of 'difference' useful. In essence, I argue that gendered identities and knowledge production remain fluid and contextual, hence suggesting that women's differing experiences shape their diverse gender identities. I also offer some reflections on the research process. I look at the researcher/researched relationship, issues around positionality, as well as the ethical considerations involved in doing fieldwork. I also reflect on how my research strategy produced a particular sample group which has shaped my findings. For instance, the recruitment sample of research participants from Islamic societies on university campuses may have generated normative responses attributed to such religious groups. In addition, I provide a summary relating to the profile of research participants.

Chapter Four reveals how British South Asian Muslim women are exploring boundaries as they navigate educational and employment settings and in so doing, push gendered boundaries to produce new gender identities. Here, I focus on the routes and the motivational factors leading respondents to choose to go to university and into employment; I analyse their families' attitudes towards young women's choices to go into higher education, and the gender inequalities prevalent within their communities as far as women's education and career options are concerned. I evaluate my participants' decisions to live 'home or away' as they negotiate campus life and social activities/norms that come with university life. Indeed, their university experiences reflect the challenges they face, and the changes they are gradually bringing about by deconstructing cultural gendered norms such as their communities' expectations of them to consider marriage instead of higher education and paid employment. Chapter Four therefore provides a framework for understanding the processes of change which are experienced by many young women as they enter higher education and employment, and how these may shape new gender identities.

In Chapter Five, I extend the theme of identity construction by paying particular attention to how respondents challenge existing gendered cultural norms to produce new gender identities as they negotiate educational and paid employment settings. In fact, as they assert new gender identities due to higher education and employment, British South Asian Muslim women are re-thinking life options such as professional careers and marriage. In this chapter, I concentrate on how educated British South Asian Muslim women are

managing Muslimness as they actively and consciously contest and construct notions of Muslimness, whilst resisting essentialised depictions or stereotypes of Islam in Britain post 9/11 and 7/7. I argue that for respondents, Muslimness is explored through an array of other social identities, notably, citizenship, ethnic, and racialised categories which inform their views and meanings of Islam. Consequently, I demonstrate how they *express* (define) and *perform* (affirm) their identities within spatial environments such as university, the workplace and home. Indeed, women choose to define and affirm their social identities through the terms (such as 'Asian', 'Pakistani', 'British Muslim' or 'British Pakistani') they use, through language and food, as well as through dress codes, which remains a significant factor aiding educated British South Asian Muslim women to navigate across their multiple but nonetheless, fluid identities. In this chapter, I emphasise that religious identity is prioritised over notions around citizenship and ethnicity by participants; for instance, the hijab is increasingly being worn by young Muslim women today as an expression of Islamic identity, while the term 'British Muslim' is utilised by respondents to illustrate that Islam is given more value than their ethnic identity. Chapter Five explores how spaces of higher education and employment lead British South Asian Muslim women to generate new gender identities within the context of these shifting debates.

In Chapter Six, I examine how young Muslim women are re-negotiating marriage in British South Asian Muslim communities by looking at how women are framing or outlining the boundaries of marriage. I contend that they navigate marriage firstly, as *institution*, secondly, as *practice* (gender relationships in marriage) and thirdly, through the *act* (style of ceremony-'nikah' versus registry) of marriage. I look at how the intergenerational changes in educated women's perceptions of gendered marital roles are altering the institution of marriage in their communities. I highlight how they construct new meanings of marriage by differentiating their positionings on marriage as 'different' from non-Muslim British society. For instance, I examine women's negotiations of pre-marital relationships as they review gendered boundaries of appropriate modes of behaviour, which South Asian Muslim women are expected to uphold prior to marriage. Also, I assess how respondents' 'new' gender expectations of marriage influence marital relationships as women demand equality in the household through domestic work and living arrangements. However, by comparing unmarried respondents' expectations of marriage to married women's experiences of marriage, I reflect on the discrepancies that exist between marital expectations and marital realities. Furthermore, I demonstrate how women are negotiating 'choice' of marriage partners by evaluating practices such as 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages, where the difficulty of making a clear distinction between them highlights the problematic issue of consent in marriages arranged by families. I also extend the theme of

arranged marriage by briefly reviewing women's perceptions of cousin and transnational marriages. These levels of analysis are intertwined as the practice of marriage is negotiated through respondents' 'agency' and 'choice' so as to challenge and construct new gender identities in marriage.

Finally, I focus on how the style of ceremony respondents choose to adopt becomes a marker which women utilise to further negotiate, and frame marriage in Britain. In navigating 'nikah' and 'registry', the ceremony becomes a symbol which represents other negotiations involved in the marriage process. On one level, I examine how respondents navigate Islamic law and English law as they consider marriage as Muslims, as well as British citizens. On a second level, I focus on women's negotiations of the nikah's stipulations from Islamic law; I argue that respondents are aiming for a discourse of gender equality within the Islamic marriage as they contest talaq and polygamy, Islamic principles essentially deemed to be patriarchal in nature by feminists. Indeed, this analysis reveals whether British South Asian Muslim women are re-working Islamic ideals of marriage by evaluating the possibilities and the limitations of such negotiations.

To conclude, in Chapter Seven, I summarise the main findings of my research and highlight how this thesis contributes to the existing literature on South Asian Muslim women's gender identities and marriage in Britain. Firstly, I suggest that this study examines how British South Asian Muslim women, within the spaces of higher education and employment, are deploying agency and independence so as to make autonomous decisions about their life options. As educated and independent young British South Asian Muslim women, they are generating new gendered identities as they challenge and alter the expected gendered norms of South Asian Muslim womanhood within their communities. Secondly, this study evaluates how the new spaces of education and employment lead young British South Asian Muslim women to formulate new understandings and expectations of marriage (as institution, practice and act). As they navigate Islamic and British ideals of marriage, young women actively negotiate intertwining legal systems so as to re-work their meanings and expectations of marriage.

I also outline the possibilities for further research in this field of study. I reflect on the fact that higher university fees may affect young women's choices of going into higher education within British South Asian Muslim communities; indeed, to what extent would financial constraints hinder young women's options as they attempt to exercise agency over educational and employment careers? I suggest that longitudinal studies built from my research sample could also examine whether, in the long-term, respondents have been successful in having professional careers as well as meet their expectations in marriage.

Furthermore, I reflect on the policy debates raised for example by The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams in February 2008, about the possibilities of recognising some aspects of Shari'a law in the UK, and the consequences this may have on British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of marriage in multicultural Britain. Finally, I end by suggesting that the study of British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities can be extended by focusing on the theoretical theme of spatiality and the construction of identity. In particular, I claim that spaces like higher educational settings provide interesting spatial locations to conduct additional in-depth studies which focus on how educated British South Asian women generate gender identities through their negotiations of place and space. Studies such as these would act as key contributions to the field of gender studies.

¹ I am from Mauritius, a former British colony which is today a Republic. Mauritius is a multicultural society comprising citizens of different ethnic origin and religion. Most Mauritians are of South Asian origin (with a Hindu majority and Muslim minority), followed by people of African, European and Chinese descent (with a Roman Catholic majority and Buddhist minority). The practice of arranged marriage in Mauritius is still prevalent among South Asian Mauritians. I interviewed educated women (Hindus and Muslims) who had arranged marriages, and their perceptions of 'choice' and 'consent' in these marriages so as to establish whether notions of 'choice' and 'consent' can in fact be used to distinguish arranged from forced marriages, following the Home Office (2000/2001) report highlighting 'consent' as a determining factor differentiating an arranged marriage from a forced marriage. This research has also shown that their notions and experiences of marriage influence their gendered identities as they navigate between autonomous choices in marriage and family/community expectations of marriage.

² I refer to 'English law' in this thesis as there may be slight differences in Scottish legislation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review: Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the literature framework and relevant intellectual debates which frame my research. As more young British South Asian Muslim women get into higher education and employment, they are re-working new gender identities as they actively embrace alternative life options such as educational careers and work. Nevertheless, even though women are increasingly gaining more independence through education and employment, studies demonstrate that marriage still remains significant for this group of young women. Here, in exposing young women's motives for considering higher educational and employment spaces, I claim that women exercise agency over the possibilities and limitations involved in embracing alternative life options such as building careers and attaining financial independence. However, I also emphasise that their negotiations not only reveal their choices to opt for educational and employment routes but also indicate the ways in which they envisage marriage post-education. I hence want to highlight that there is a link to be drawn between women's agency, education and employment, and the possible impacts this relationship creates upon women's other future life options such as marriage. The literature I explore in this chapter therefore aims to address the following questions: what effects are education and employment having on young British South Asian Muslim women's abilities to re-work their gender identities? How are their re-workings of their gender identities in turn influencing their understandings and expectations of marriage? How are such understandings shaping the negotiations of marriage expectations of these young women?

I have structured this literature review in three main parts. First, I review the educational and employment contexts of South Asian Muslim women in Britain. I contend that early research on the schooling of South Asian Muslim girls and the bearings which their educational experiences have on their gender identities have indicated the ways in which discourses on ethnicity, culture and religion shape the construction of stereotypical depictions of South Asian Muslim womanhood within the spaces of education in Britain. The argument I highlight here is that racialised discourses documented in previous studies on South Asian girls and educational achievements mostly suggest that young women do not opt for educational paths post compulsory level due to marriage. This point remains extremely significant to my study as it shows a direct link between education and marriage. How are young women's educational aims affected by marriage? Are they actively navigating their

options so as to consider both education (and the potential outcome of employment) as well as marriage? In so doing, are their gender identities evolving?

More recent literature has focused on the new wave of South Asian Muslim women entering into higher education and ultimately, employment. Within this body of work, the motivational factors pushing women to consider education and work not only demonstrate the positive outcomes of education and employment but also reveal that social class and women's educational backgrounds, women's negotiations with their families to consider educational careers, as well as the expectations placed upon these young women (by families) to uphold ideals of South Asian womanhood (and consequently, gendered norms) within their communities all contribute to women's opportunities of embracing education and work and hence, be in a position to explore alternative gender identities. More importantly, it also addresses how marriage could eventually be negotiated by these young women. Questions such as would education and employment delay marriage, and alter the gendered relationships within it remain at the forefront of the debates about South Asian Muslim women's access to education and work in the UK. How do women's independence and agency affect the institution of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities; for instance, how do women respond to the practice of arranged marriage? Are they able to exercise more agency upon the choice of marriage partners?

Second, I identify the theoretical strands within feminist theory which I utilise to conceptualise my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of their gender identities. I begin by examining how women's experiences of gendered identities have been documented in feminist literature by interrogating the politics of 'difference' within feminism so as to assess whether 'difference' as a concept is useful in the analysis of ethnic minority women's experiences in the UK. More specifically, I draw on the concept of 'difference' in order to acknowledge the significance which discourses of culture, ethnicity and 'race' have in assessing the positions of South Asian Muslim women, and their re-negotiations of gendered identities as they explore higher education and the labour market. Also, in focusing on the feminist postmodernist thinking on gender identity as performance, I suggest that the language of performativity helps inform and define educated British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of gender identities within the spaces of education, work, as well as marriage. I contend that through increased agency and independence gained within educational and employment spaces, British South Asian Muslim women are empowered to generate and hence 'perform' new gendered identities. In this section, I foreground the ways in which I use this scholarship to inform my study.

Third, I argue that marriage remains a significant site within which British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of their gender identities occur. I suggest that the institution of marriage acts as a locus through which it is possible to evaluate and understand these young women's navigations of gendered relationships; more specifically, I assert that marriage and the family remain gendered formations within which gendered identities are negotiated and contested. As independence, acquired within the spaces of higher education and employment, are exercised, women's expectations of marriage and the gendered relationships within marriage and the family unit alter, hence enabling them to affirm new gender identities. Throughout this thesis, I use the scholarship on marriage and South Asian Muslim identities to assess the significance which marriage still has for educated South Asian Muslim women in Britain. In negotiating two intertwining legal frameworks, Islamic and English law, the definitions of marriage for British South Asian Muslim women are constantly being attributed new meanings, thereby creating scope for re-working and redefining the institution of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities, as well as expanding the possibilities for women to navigate new gender identities. In examining the current state of marriage in Britain, I raise questions regarding the extent to which South Asian Muslims maintain marriage as a core social institution, as alternatives such as cohabitation become increasingly popular in Britain. I argue that the cultural and religious significance which South Asian Muslims attribute to marriage helps to sustain the popularity of marriage in their communities. As such, marriage acts as an important social institution aiding in the maintenance of ethno-religious identities and shaping British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities. For instance, through the customary cultural custom of arranged marriage, young women illustrate their navigations of marriage and the affirmation of new gender identities as they actively negotiate consent, agency and choice within marriage, hence demonstrating their changing perceptions and expectations of marriage.

In this introduction, I have highlighted the major aspects of the literature which I will be reviewing in this chapter. In particular, I focus on the literature on British South Asian women's positionings within educational and employment settings, gender identity and theoretical concepts such as 'difference' and performativity within feminist theory, as well as studies on marriage and the family in the UK. In essence, I outline how these studies ground my analysis of young British South Asian Muslim women's development of new gender identities and new understandings and expectations of marriage as they negotiate educational and employment settings.

2.2 BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM WOMEN, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The educational and employment statuses of South Asian Muslims in Britain have been well documented in the literature (Ghuman, 1994; Bhavnani, 1994; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz, 1995; Modood *et al.*, 1997; Charles, 2002; Mason, 2003; Anwar, 2005; Clark and Drinkwater, 2007). Overall, statistics have shown that British South Asian Muslims' rates of educational qualifications and unemployment are lower than other ethnic groups in the UK (Jones 1993; Mason, 2000, Peach, 2006). However, the important point to note is that despite such unfavourable entry rates into education and employment, the second generation of South Asian Muslims in Britain, particularly young British South Asian Muslim women, are gradually altering British South Asian Muslims' educational and employment patterns, as opposed to the previous generation of Muslim migrants (Anwar, 2005: 34-36). These generational changes in educational and employment demographics remain significant for my study as they highlight that younger generations of South Asian Muslims in Britain are aiming for alternative life options in choosing educational and employment routes. In the case of young women, their decisions to enter the new spaces of education and employment lead to possibilities of generating new gender identities within these spheres.

There has been significant research on the ways in which young South Asian Muslim women negotiate their gender identities as they navigate their social contexts (Knott and Khoker, 1993; Basit, 1997; Haw, 1998; Mohammad, 2005; Dwyer, 2000; Kay, 2007; Brown, 2006; Afshar, 2008; Bowlby and Lloyd-Evans, 2009; Phillips, 2009). Of particular relevance to my study of South Asian Muslim women and their involvement within educational and employment spaces is the body of early research on South Asian Muslim women and education, which has concentrated on the schooling of young Muslim girls of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent in Britain. The main findings from these studies have tended to suggest that young South Asian Muslim girls' gender identities remain embedded within racialised discourses which promote stereotypical depictions of South Asian Muslim womanhood in the UK (Haw, 1998; Basit, 1997; Bhatti, 1999; Parker-Jenkins *et al.*, 1997; Shain, 2003). This literature remains particularly important for my analysis of women's gendered identities as the discussions raised on issues such as ethnicity, religion and culture within educational settings (secondary schooling) reveal the existing link between the definitions of South Asian gendered identities and the educational performances of South Asian Muslim girls at school. Ultimately, they highlight how such discourses have affected young women's gender identities as they negotiate educational paths. For instance, Basit (1997) discusses the ways in which stereotypical depictions of young Muslim girls as 'submissive' and 'obedient'

contribute to the racialisation of the latter's gender identities at school. Likewise, Shain's work (2003) also epitomises this notion of racialised gender identities of young South Asian Muslim girls within the media by calling this process the 'discursive construction of Asian femininity'. More specifically, Shain (2003: 8) argues that South Asian girls' identities remain constructed (by teachers) within set discourses so as to fit stereotypical images such as school girls being encouraged by family to abandon educational paths so as to consider arranged marriages.

In terming this process of racialisation of gender identities as 'cultural pathology', Shain (2003, 2-3) rightly claims that it is the notion of 'difference' which remains key to the construction of South Asian Muslim womanhood within settings such as educational establishments. The salient point to highlight from Shain's (2003:8) study of South Asian Muslim girls and schooling remains that even though these racialised discourses of gender identities indicate that 'Asian girls are most commonly positioned as the victims of such practices or actions', South Asian girls are within processes of re-working cultural and religious practices to affirm new gender identities. Their navigations signify a positive approach to constructing their gender identities within the spaces of education and ultimately, within marriage. Shain's research has not only exposed the existing link between education and marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities but has also especially highlighted the early negotiations of South Asian Muslim girls as they navigate educational paths and marriage in Britain. As these young women gain wider choices and greater independence to navigate education beyond compulsory secondary schooling, what impacts would their negotiations have on their motivations to pursue educational careers and how would their choices of embarking upon an educational career affect other life options such as employment and marriage?

The emerging literature on young South Asian Muslim women, higher education and employment in Britain looks at firstly, why the participation of young South Asian Muslim women into higher education and paid employment is increasing, and secondly, how education and paid employment may help these young women to develop alternative gender identities within British South Asian Muslim communities (Ahmad, 2001; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). The main identifiable factors emanating from the literature pertain to differences in social class; family negotiations of educational aims between daughters and parents, as well as the expectations families place upon daughters to uphold ideals of South Asian Muslim womanhood within their communities. As Bagguley and Hussain (2007: 3) state, 'for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, going to university is not considered to be a 'natural progression from school' by parents as well as teachers. Research reveals that there is a definite link between social class and the educational aspirations of young British South

Asian Muslim women. Differences in social class affect South Asian Muslim women's intake into higher education; research demonstrates that it is easier for young British Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who are from middle-class educated families to enter higher education and later have a career, than those from working-class backgrounds due to the motivations and aspirations of middle-class parents (Evans and Bowlby, 2000; Mohammad, 2005). Hence, studies such as these raise the point that educational backgrounds, advice, and support all contribute to the promotion of British South Asian Muslim women's educational aims. However, the important question which these findings pose for my study pertains to how young South Asian Muslim women from non-educational backgrounds, and/or working-class backgrounds negotiate with, and manage to persuade their non-educated parents for chances to go to university and have better and wider opportunities in terms of paid employment post study.

Research suggests that within South Asian Muslim families, especially within working-class families, older siblings or cousins, defined as 'role models' or 'pioneers', are seen as having 'paved the way' for younger women to enter into higher education. Older educated family members hence act as a positive influence in helping younger women to develop aspirations to gain academic qualifications (Ahmad *et al.*, 2003: 19; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007), thus enabling them to be in a position where they can make informed decisions on whether to participate into education and eventually, the labour force. As Irving *et al.*'s. (1999) research on young South Asian Muslim women and career/training opportunities also maintains, young women's decisions on their future academic and work careers depend heavily on the advice/information they may be receiving from either family, or educational bodies. If women from non-educational social backgrounds are not provided with guidance, then it is plausible to suggest educational aspirations could remain limited. Thus, ensuring that these women obtain the right information from the correct career/educational and community establishments could influence their perspectives of education and employment (Irving *et al.*, 1999). If not, it is possible that factors such as these may discourage British South Asian Muslim women from participating more fully into the public sphere as they may feel isolated, unsupported or excluded within larger British society.

In evaluating the reasons for the lower rates of educational achievements of British South Asian Muslim women, studies (Irving *et al.*, 1999; Ahmad, 2001; Abbas, 2003) have also explained that South Asian Muslim women's limited access to education is due to parental and community attitudes. These attitudes pertain to the potential effects which educational experiences may have upon young South Asian Muslim women's gender identities. As Irving *et al.* (1999: 123) put it, South Asian Muslim parents tend to perceive the

'aims of education in a secular society' to be at 'odds with an Islamic education, which confines all knowledge within the framework of the Qur'an which perpetuates a strong sense of community and family solidarity'. However, despite these apparent tensions, it is possible for women to promote their educational careers if parents are ensured that their daughters' reputation and honour (izzat) remain safe; young women are offered parental support to aspire for better job prospects and better education, as long as women agree to conform to their families' cultural/religious norms (Ahmad, 2001; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). It appears that for women to gain access to educational routes, the key factor in them succeeding to achieve their goals rests in them bargaining with family, as well as developing strategies to resist expected gendered norms of South Asian Muslim womanhood within their families and communities so as to embrace the possibilities of further education.

Active negotiations imply that young women can be astute in juggling their gender identities; they juggle domestic religious/cultural expectations, as well as educational and employment roles. For instance, in showing more involvement within their communities and interest in their religion, women would gain the approval of their families to pursue their educational goals or career opportunities as parents would be assured that their daughters are not transgressing normative cultural or gender expectations (Ali, 1992; Macey, 1999), and hence, not at risk of being 'morally loose' through the 'anglicising' effects of university campus life (Ahmad, 2001: 146). Therefore, although research indicates that it is not straightforward for women to automatically consider tertiary education, studies also support the fact that young Muslim women's families do not always impose traditional gendered roles and ideals upon them, as long as negotiations and compromises between parents and daughters are reached. These findings suggest the key questions of my thesis: how are women's negotiations with their families leading them to actively get into higher education and employment? As they negotiate educational settings and ultimately, consider employment, to what extent is it possible for them to re-work their gender identities as educated and financially independent British South Asian Muslim women? What consequences would these alternative life options have on women's expectations of marriage?

Previous studies have documented the link between the ways in which marriage influences women's employment careers. More specifically, Lindley *et al.*, (2004: 153-165) have traced South Asian ethnic minority women's economic activity in Britain from 1992 to 2002, and the relationship which exists between women's employment status, family structures and marriage expectations. Their study highlights the link which exists between women's employment and marriage, and demonstrates that South Asian women's economic profiles alter when family structure alters; as women marry, women's employment figures within British South Asian communities fall. These findings remain indicative of how

marriage may influence their employment status as British South Asian Muslim women decide to leave employment once they marry and have children. In highlighting that marriage and family demographics must be acknowledged whilst reviewing ethnic minority women's economic activity, Lindley *et al.*, (2004) rightly stress the possibilities of future research in denoting whether young British women from South Asian communities will continue, or contrast the economic standings of women of previous generation in negotiating employment prospects post marriage. If the second generation of South Asian Muslim women in the UK is increasingly getting into employment, following tertiary educational paths, as recent research (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008) has shown, it is probable that women's marital expectations of leaving work to look after the family could slowly lose ground as younger women decide to consider employment before, as well as after marriage. As Dale *et al.*'s work (2002) has previously noted, educated women develop sound strategies so as to negotiate employment and family life in order to fulfil their career aspirations; for instance, shifting from full-time to part-time employment when their children are young provide them with a solution to continue working. Ultimately, if educated British South Asian Muslim women decide to remain in paid employment after marriage, they would be re-working and affirming new gender identities.

Education and economic independence influence young British South Asian Muslim women's future life expectations, consequently encouraging them to generate and re-work new gender identities through their navigations of educational and employment spaces. As the literature indicates, negotiations towards higher educational and employment routes are indicative of a few motivational factors pushing British South Asian Muslim women to consider education and employment as options. Firstly, education and paid employment appear to improve self-worth in offering these young women degrees of independence and freedom (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Bhopal, 2009). Secondly, Ahmad *et al.*, (2003: 20) suggest that women are motivated to gain qualifications so as not to have to rely on a man for financial means and be able 'to stand on my own feet'; this suggests that women are re-assessing their future economic standing within their families and communities, hence demonstrating their attempts to re-work their gender identities as educated and financially independent women. Linked to this idea of women's economic autonomy, recent research by Dwyer and Shah (2009: 63) has shown that some women consider education as a safety device, or 'insurance' in case of unforeseen circumstances such as a divorce.

Thirdly, women hoped to be better mothers and members of their own communities as in having themselves embraced educational routes, they felt better equipped to teach and ensure that the next generation follows educational careers (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007); such emphasis on educational paths and its possible positive outcomes, such as for instance,

employment, would then influence these women's positionings and gender identities within their families, as well as within marriage. This group of young South Asian Muslim women are hence re-working normative gendered discourses of South Asian womanhood (uneducated and economically dependent) to not only embrace the feminist ideals of being financially independent, but to also re-define their gender identities as educated Muslim women capable of influencing the educational prospects of future generations within British South Asian Muslim communities. Fourthly, education contributes to women's status within the nuclear and extended family, increasing their 'value' as daughters in the family, and raising the family's reputation and pride within the community (Dale *et al.*, 2002); an 'educated' daughter, considered an asset to the family, then obtains considerable leverage and bargaining power as far as marriage is concerned (Ahmad *et al.*, 2003). Indeed, access to education may in turn influence women's decisions of when to get married, as well as their choices of marriage partners in them potentially considering educated partners as opposed to non-educated partners. In some cases, education could also provide young women with the independence and agency to delay or postpone marriage, hence altering British South Asian Muslim women's perceptions and expectations of marriage (Khanum, 1995; Ahmad *et al.*, 2003).

Previous studies which have discussed the bearings that education may have upon marriage within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain have demonstrated the direct impacts which women's educational careers have on the institution of marriage within these communities. For instance, Bhopal (1997) claims that educated women are more likely to reject the practice of arranged marriages as opposed to uneducated women. Focusing on women from diverse South Asian communities in Britain, Bhopal's (1999) research indicated that highly educated independent women, irrespective of ethnicity and religion, rejected arranged marriages and were not likely to arrange their children's marriage, while women from less educated backgrounds embraced the practice as being part of their 'culture' and 'Asian identity'. More recently, Bhopal's (2009) research, which focuses on education, arranged marriages and dowry practice in British South Asian communities, maintains that higher education provides women with independence over the degrees of choice they have over the marriage process. Bhopal (2009) emphasises the significant links between education, social change and marriage, illustrating how choices around education and marriage are negotiated, and that the practice of marriage is viewed differently from women of different social classes as well as educational levels. Bhopal's (2009) findings suggest that educated women seem to be successful in affirming an individual identity above, for instance, kinship identity, hence embracing new gender identities as educated South Asian women. If educated women have the agency to reject cultural practices such as arranged marriages, it is also

possible that they will more often be involved in 'love marriages' or will choose a partner of equal educational and economic standing (Ahmad, 2001). However, the distinction between educated and non-educated women and their choices in marriage prospects are not as straightforward as marriage within South Asian Muslim communities depends on complex factors such as family relationships, kinship networks, social and economic class and ethnic origins (Afshar, 1989; Ahmad, 2001; Dwyer, 2000; Charsley and Shaw, 2006). While higher education is considered as an asset to young Muslim women's futures, there is also the possibility that women become 'too educated' and 'too old' for marriage, as documented by Ahmad *et al.* (2003). Young women therefore also express concerns that it will then be difficult to find husbands who share similar educational or economic stature (Ahmad *et al.*, 2003: 20).

It appears that British South Asian Muslim women have to carefully negotiate their options in order to reach a balance between education, employment and marriage prospects. As reviewed in this section, British South Asian Muslim women's access into higher education and paid employment depend upon factors such as social class and educational backgrounds, as well as the levels of negotiations (with families) women have to engage with so as to pursue educational and work careers. Previous research reveals how education and employment have contributed to women's financial independence, as well as providing them with alternative avenues (other than marriage), post compulsory secondary education, thereby aiding them in promoting new gender identities as young and educated British South Asian Muslim women. The remaining key questions pertain to the ways in which agency, acquired through education and employment, impact on these young women's perceptions and expectations of marriage; consequently, how are new gender identities developed and affirmed? In this thesis, I extend these themes in assessing the ways in which access to educational and employment spaces influence young women's life options. As women generate new gender identities, to what extent do their negotiations open up possibilities to re-work and re-evaluate their marriage options and expectations? In the following section, I elaborate on the ways in which I use feminist theory to frame my study.

2.3 GENDER IDENTITY AND FEMINIST THEORY: CONCEPTUALISING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Here, I reflect on how feminist theoretical concepts may be utilised as praxis for my study of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of gender identities as notions around education, employment, and marriage are re-worked. For the purpose of my research, I foreground the importance of two feminist stands which I believe remain the most significant. Firstly, I draw on the feminist politics of 'difference' in order to acknowledge the

significance which discourses of culture, ethnicity and 'race' have in assessing the positions of ethnic minority women and their re-workings of gender identities as they explore education, employment and marriage. In particular, I highlight how racialised discourses around 'difference' influence British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations and navigations of gender identities as they explore spaces such as education and employment. How do theoretical frameworks around 'difference' and gender identity politics inform my study of women's evolving gendered identities: more explicitly, how does the notion of 'difference' in feminist theory aid in comprehending the experiences of ethnic minority women in the UK as they evolve within multicultural Britain? What impacts do understandings of cultural and ethnic difference have on young women's re-workings of their gender identities? Does the concept of 'difference' aid in evaluating women's navigations of their social contexts as they attempt to generate new gender identities as educated and financially independent British South Asian Muslim women?

Secondly, I draw on postmodern/poststructuralist feminist theory to provide an understanding of how gender identities are constructed and performed by women; as an extension of the feminist politics of 'difference', postmodern feminist theory supports the notion that gender identities are not fixed as they are negotiated along axes of power, agency and choice. More specifically: how is feminist theory on agency and performance useful in helping us comprehend and evaluate British South Asian Muslim women's positionings and re-workings of their gender identities in multicultural British society? Also, how do theories of performativity inform and define educated women's reworkings of marriage? The dynamicism involved in performing and generating new gender identities in the context of ethnic minority women's positionings remains key to the evolution and hence, the re-workings of gender identities in British South Asian Muslim communities.

2.3.1 Gender identity and the concept of 'difference'

The concept of 'difference' has been utilised within feminist literature to suggest that 'woman' should not be homogenised, where a critique of Eurocentric models of feminist theory by non-Western and post-colonial feminists reiterated the need to embrace the diversity of women's experiences and gender identities (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Mohanty *et al.*, 1991; Spivak, 1988). Non-Western feminists reiterate that women's experiences of 'race', ethnicity and culture must not be essentialised if their diverse experiences are to be recognised (Afshar and Maynard, 1994). In defining social experience as 'cultural construction', Brah (1996) suggests that diverse realities are contested and negotiated, thus giving rise to multiple subjectivities and diverse gendered identities. However, the main point to note from Brah's (1996: 234-241) analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and culture

is that maintaining culture is a process. It is a 'reiterative performance' which is then 'constructed' as 'custom' or 'tradition'. Brah's (1996: 234) notion of 'reiterative performance' is significant to my study as Brah's (1996) argument opens up debates about the agency involved in negotiating, contesting and performing cultural and ethnic customs. As young British South Asian Muslim women actively navigate cultural and ethnic identities, they en-act or 'perform' diverse gender identities through individual agency. However, their negotiations of performative identities are also embedded within social and political constructs, indicating that the performance of gender identities are contested and constructed within young women's social realities.

Previous research on ethnic minority women and their positionings within the labour market illustrates the ways in which racialised discourses have influenced British South Asian Muslim women's evolution of gendered identities. In essence, studies portray how discourses of 'race', ethnicity and 'difference' impact on the degrees of agency women may have as they negotiate education and employment. For instance, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) have stressed how the interactions of 'race', sex and class influence ethnic minority women's diverse experiences as they negotiate the labour market. Their sample of ethnic minority women in the UK has shown that these interactions impact on women's social realities which categorise them within specific racialised discourses. Indeed, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992: 80) account for South Asian Muslim women's lowest rates of economic activity due to racism (in employment spaces) and the sexual division of labour at home and outside the home. Similarly, Brah's (1993: 441-458) definition of the position of South Asian women within the labour market as a 'racialised subject' - the 'Other', denounces the stereotypical depictions of South Asian womanhood as being 'different'.

The acknowledgment of racialised discourses remain pertinent in my research as they address the question of how understandings of ethnicity, culture, 'race' and gender impact on British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations and re-workings of gendered identities as they navigate the spaces of education, employment and marriage. As Brah's (1993) studies have indicated, ethnic minority women's experiences of exclusion and subordination, embedded within the structural and cultural dimensions of paid employment, could be denoted as racism or racial categorisation perpetuating essentialist discourses. So as to emphasise the gendered and racialised processes women face in their daily social experiences, Brah notes two intersecting dimensions which remain useful in understanding women's social realities: first, that Muslim woman, as a category, has become the 'object of social discourse' in Britain, and second but most importantly, the need for us to go beyond this categorisation and deconstruct such discourses in order to realise that Muslim women remain 'concrete historical subjects'. The latter point remains particularly significant as it highlights Muslim

women's multiple positionings in British society, as well as demonstrates their agency in generating gendered identities through lived social experiences.

In elaborating on the complex social realities of South Asian Muslim women within employment and education, Brah (1993) enforces how fixed representations of Muslim woman (by employers, teachers and guidance advisors) within British discourse affect their gendered identities. For instance, their depictions as 'dependants who would most likely be married off', or their confinement within the patriarchal 'institution of purdah' preventing them from participating fully into public life, indicate the challenges young women face as they begin to deploy agency so as to resist and overcome these paradigms in order to articulate new gender identities as educated and economically active British South Asian Muslim women. Brah's (1993) findings remain crucial in assessing South Asian women's experiences of employment as they not only reflect women's position in the labour market as being marked by 'cultural ideologies' but more importantly, also highlight the 'role of education in mediating job aspirations and racism' (Brah, 1993: 441). Indeed, Brah's (1993) work also hints at the changes which education may generate as more young women decide to embrace educational avenues; with education, British South Asian Muslim women could be more equipped to navigate the racialised dimensions of spaces such as employment, as they attempt to resist essentialist notions of South Asian womanhood.

In response to such claims, in this thesis, I focus on how young British South Asian Muslim women are effectively challenging and resisting both 'racialised gendered boundaries' and 'cultural ideologies', enforced by gender expectations around education and employment, the family and marriage, so as to comprehend the strategies these young women employ in order to generate new or alternative gender identities. While Brah's study (1993) primarily focuses on the labour market and South Asian Muslim women's aspirations, in my research, I aim to firstly, assess how higher education aids women to access the labour market and secondly, how young women's paid employment and higher educational experiences further influence other life options such as marriage. Women's navigations mirror an affirmation of new gender identities, which remain indicative of an agency demonstrated through their negotiations and choices of future life options as they juggle important decisions revolving around education, employment and marriage. It is against this background of South Asian women's social and economic statuses within educational and employment careers, as well as approaches to marriage in Britain, that I investigate the evolution of British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities: how do young women re-work their gender identities as they decide to juggle education and work, and how do their decisions impact on marriage prospects and experiences, hence aiding in the evolution of gendered identities of South Asian Muslim women in Britain?

2.3.2 Performing gender identities

Postmodern feminists have attempted to destabilise the concept of identity and gender by arguing that these principles cannot be regarded as fixed; they remain fluid and unstable. As such, the category 'woman' as a unified subject is deconstructed as a non-unitary and fixed identity, where 'gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently within different historical contexts' (Butler, 1990: 3). As Butler (1990: 3) maintains, when women's positionings are studied, it is important to recognise that gender intersects with 'racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities' to produce women's diverse social realities. Consequently, gender is 'produced' and 'maintained' within specific political and cultural structures. Bell (1999: 2) suggests that the concept of 'performativity' must not just essentialise the fluidity of identities but must also 'question how identities continue to be produced, embodied and performed with social and political consequence'. This idea can be linked and illustrated through Brah's (1996) notion of 'reiterative performance', which I discussed earlier. As gender is culturally informed and performed, culture (cultural traditions or customs) can also be viewed as performance through the invention and creation of new cultural and ethnic identities. In linking these two theoretical frameworks, in the context of my study, I suggest that young women from South Asian ethnic minorities in Britain grapple with this idea of performance so as to generate gendered identities which are constantly being re-worked and re-affirmed within their dynamic socio-political contexts.

Butler's (1990) concept that 'gender is culturally constructed' remains useful in promoting the idea that gender identities remain inherently unstable. As femininity and masculinity become movable concepts, 'agency' (from bodies) then renders the fluidity of gendered identities possible. Linked to the notion that bodies remain movable concepts, in deconstructing the body, Lockford (2004: 3) further engages with this concept of utilising agency to affirm gender identity; agency empowers women with the possibilities to exercise individualised choice over their actions and ultimately, over their identities. Lockford's (2004) argument that femininity is always essentialised/stereotyped to represent 'compulsory' or 'appropriate' versions of 'female gender performance' remains vital as it illustrates how agency and choice, through a process of 'performance', aid in producing different femininities, thus demonstrating diversity in gender identities. This notion of performing identities expresses the possibilities of challenging essentialised femininities. In challenging such essentialism, women's 'agency and choice butt against political agendas and ideological constructs' so as to produce alternative femininities (Lockford, 2004: 3). Therefore, for Lockford and Butler, following de Beauvoir's thesis that 'one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman', gender then becomes a performance, where gender is 'performatively

produced’ to ‘constitute an identity it is purported to be; gender is always a doing’ (Butler, 1990: 25).

In the case of young South Asian Muslim women in Britain, it is possible to suggest that in actively embracing the spaces of higher education and employment, they are inevitably promoting and asserting new aspects of South Asian Muslim womanhood, and hence, developing new and diverse femininities. Laurie *et al.*, (1999: 135-151) expresses this notion of new femininities in their study of young British South Asian Muslim adolescent girls and their negotiations of gender identities within the different spaces of school and home. More specifically, Laurie *et al.*, (1999) maintain that the negotiation of feminine identities demonstrates that through their contestations of dominant discourses on ‘appropriate Muslim femininity’ (supported by family/community expectations or the media), young women are empowered to make their own individual choices about which femininity to ‘perform’ as they engage with the process of re-working their gender identities. This language of performativity, which is also employed by Werbner (2005) to emphasise how representations of culture and ethnicity aid in the recreation and evolution of identities within the context of multiculturalism and identity formation, remains useful to conceptualise my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women’s negotiations of gendered identities.

Drawing on all these approaches to theorising gender and performativity, I develop a framework for how young British South Asian Muslim women are negotiating and re-working their gender identities in response to new educational and employment settings, and how their newly acquired independence shapes their approach to other life options such as marriage. I use the idea of ‘performance’ in my analysis because I think this term adequately captures the possibilities of individual agency and the choices young women make about how they ‘perform’ different identities. However, the concept of performance, drawing particularly from Brah (1996) and Butler (1990), also draws attention to the ways in which gender is a social, cultural and political construct, where women negotiate the parameters of ‘appropriate’ or ‘accepted’ performances of gender within cultural, ethnic or social frameworks. In the context of South Asian marriages in Britain, in particular, within the practice of arranged marriage and the Islamic marriage (nikah) in British South Asian Muslim communities, young women actively negotiate family expectations and individual aspirations in their navigations of marriage. It is within these frameworks that I position my analysis of marriage and young women’s performance of new gendered identities within British South Asian Muslim communities.

2.4 MARRIAGE IN BRITAIN: NEGOTIATING GENDER, ISLAM AND CULTURE

Marriage remains an institution which is highly regarded by many ethnic and religious groups worldwide as it is considered to be the foundation of the family.¹ As Basit (1997) argues, it is important to value marriage as a social institution which binds society as a whole and ensures the perpetuation of cultural traits or identities within different social groups. Research conducted on marriage within South Asian communities in Britain strongly supports this belief, suggesting that marriage, as an institution, aids in the maintenance of religious and cultural identities within British South Asian Muslim communities (Basit, 1997; Bhopal, 1997; Shaw, 2000; Shaw and Charlsley, 2006). More importantly, these studies have also revealed that as the institution of marriage promotes social ties, women's gendered roles and identities reflect how gendered norms within South Asian Muslim communities operate. For instance, existing literature (Basit, 1997; Bhopal, 1999) has highlighted the ways in which young women are expected by their families to uphold gendered norms around sexual purity by adhering to cultural and religious codes before marriage. These norms encourage women to abstain from pre-marital relationships in the name of honour (izzat).

In my research, I have therefore chosen to use marriage as the key site within which I investigate the ways in which women's increased agency, gained through education and employment, influence their re-workings of their gender identities. I do so because as the literature indicates, although education and paid employment are considered desirable options, educated British South Asian Muslim women still regard marriage as an extremely significant institution, notably, the preferred norm of social/sexual relations. In my study, I attempt to elucidate why young, educated and financially independent South Asian Muslim women in Britain value marriage, and how does their increased independence affect their gender roles, their expectations and the meanings they attribute to marriage. What impacts would these young women's increased independence have on the nature of the institution of marriage within their communities? How would educated British South Asian Muslim women deal with the challenges posed by gendered cultural and religious norms encouraged by the institution of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities?

2.4.1 The institution of marriage in Britain and Islam

The institution of marriage in Britain

Recent statistics estimate that three out of five marriages in Britain today are not religious but secular marriage contracts, known as civil marriages (Hall, 2002; Barlow et al., 2005).² The option to marry non-religiously, for instance, outside the Church of England, by

civil registration, eradicated the need for any particular religious marriage ceremony in the UK - the formalisation of a marriage, as a socio-legal institution, is nowadays recognised through the secular marriage contract (Bernardes, 1997; Finch, 2004). Previous studies conducted on the evolution of the institution of marriage and the family in Britain have documented the ways in which social changes have influenced the gender relationships within marriage and the family unit (Bailey, 1992; Lewis, 2001); indeed, social movements such as the sexual revolution and gay liberation movements have aided in dismantling the fixed cultural notions of the family as an institution, the social relationships within it, as well as the historical traditional values associated with it (Elliot, 1996; Staggenborg, 1998; McKie *et al.*, 1999). The conjugal family hence became representative of an oppressive institution for women, where gender roles in marriage were then questioned and redefined by feminist movements. The meanings and structures of 'family', marriage and parenthood in Britain have thus undergone considerable social transformations, hence opening up new possibilities for women to negotiate new gender identities within the dynamic settings of family or marriage. In essence, women's quest for gender equality within marriage highlighted changes in how gender relationships could be alternatively perceived and negotiated, reflecting on how gender has been conceptualised in relation to family and marriage in Britain. This debate highlights how young South Asian Muslim women living in Britain today could possibly navigate the meanings of marriage and the family as they attempt to generate new gender identities.

The institution of the Islamic marriage

Previous studies have emphasised that the institution of marriage in Islam (nikah), originates from diverse nomadic marriage practices (Hekmat, 1997), where concepts underlying the Islamic marriage follow a patriarchal pattern enforcing unequal gender roles and relationships between spouses (Nasir, 1990; Pearl and Menski, 1998). Although marriage by contract remains the standard Muslim marriage norm, it also encourages the fulfilment of a set of criteria. Contracting the nikah relates to an offer (ijab) of marriage and its acceptance (qabul) before witnesses, with the full consent of both parties involved (Anderson, 1976; Singh, 1992). Marriage, recognised as a legal framework, is for legitimate sexual intercourse and the procreation of children; both spouses have a religious obligation to satisfy one another sexually, where sexual intercourse outside of marriage is regarded as a sin (haram) (Coulson, 1979; Choueiri, 1990; Dahl, 1997). Nonetheless, despite the contractual nature of the marriage contract in Islam, it is also considered a religious duty to be fulfilled by Muslims. Even though Islamic law has undergone reforms within trade/business practices and inheritance, jurisdiction regarding the institution of marriage, and its related gender issues around divorce and polygamy³ were not radically altered (Doi, 1992; Hekmat, 1997).⁴ It is

therefore important to recognise that Quranic laws surrounding family laws within the institution of the Islamic marriage are not as inherently static, but infused with cultural customs, social traditions and political environments present at any point in time, although some Islamic schools continue to regard Shari'a law as unalterable (Mernissi, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 1993).⁵ As a result, family law and its jurisdiction regarding marriage, divorce, polygamy, maintenance and the status/treatment of wives in Islam remain central to the debates of how the Islamic institution of marriage must be understood, formulated, and more importantly, followed by Muslims (Pearl and Menski, 1998).

The literature on the workings of the Islamic marriage argues that both women and men enter into a relationship of marriage as two equal partners. However, although stipulations within Islamic jurisdiction remain clear that wives and husbands enter into the marriage contract as equals, there is an indication that laws regarding divorce (*talaq*) and polygamy within Islam differ considerably for spouses, thereby highlighting the inherent gender bias within the *nikah* (Khadduri, 1978; Mernissi, 1987; Ahmed, 1992; Dahl, 1997). Although a husband and wife may mutually consent to separate amicably, nevertheless, unlike the husband, a wife can only independently initiate divorce if the husband agrees to such a divorce (Fyzee, 1964; Bareja, 1988; Nasir, 1990; Doi, 1992; Dahl, 1997; Iqbal, 1997). The *nikah* can therefore, according to some Muslim authors, only be annulled if the husband verbally repudiates the wife by saying the words 'I divorce you' three times in immediate succession (Doi, 1992).⁶ This apparent male right to unilateral divorce in Islam has led feminists raise concerns about *talaq* as epitomising patriarchy, whereby the Muslim wife is perceived as inferior to her husband, in rights and status (El Saadawi, 1980; Boudhiba, 1985; Kandiyoti, 1991; Mernissi, 1991; Keddie and Baron, 1991; Ahmed, 1992; El-Solh and Mabro, 1994; Moghissi, 1999; Majid, 2002; Wadud, 2006; Shirazi, 2009). However, this facet of Islamic law (female repudiation) has been modified in some Muslim communities worldwide following modern, secular legal intervention and feminist critiques in cases where Muslim women are abused or forced to accept their husbands' second marriages to other women, with the threat of divorce and consequently, of abandonment and economic deprivation.

Within the Islamic marriage, the duty of maintenance by the husband is matched by the obligation of the wife to reside with her husband unless there is a valid reason for her refusal to do so; a wife who leaves the matrimonial home is seen by traditional Muslim law as a 'rebellious and disobedient' wife (Pearl and Menski, 1998).⁷ The institution of marriage within Islamic law thus appears to draw strict boundaries as far as gender status and the roles of wives and husbands are concerned. Clearly, marriage in Islam is reflective of controlled household rules and gendered roles which Muslims are expected to abide to in order to satisfy the criterion set by the institution of the Islamic marriage. In relation to my study, the

questions I am interested to highlight here are: how would educated and economically independent South Asian Muslim women in Britain respond to such gendered expectations, encompassed within the ethos of the Islamic marriage? Would Islamic concepts of divorce and polygamy lead young British South Asian Muslim women to actively re-work and re-formulate more equitable versions of talaq, within the larger framework of Islamic jurisdiction? Could education and employment spaces, and the independence and agency gained from their experiences lead these young women to develop new understandings and expectations of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities?

2.4.2 Negotiating gender: navigating ‘family’ and marriage

Studies have highlighted the tendency in early research to rely on the dichotomy ‘biological’ versus ‘social’ in order to pinpoint the meaning of gender within social institutions such as family and marriage (Staggenborg, 1998: 2). Nevertheless, an evolution in the understanding of gender now supports the claim that ‘gender resides not only in individuals but also in organisations and institutions within societies (Whittier *et al.*, 1995, quoted in Staggenborg, 1998: 2), hence raising the questions of why do women and men adopt particular gendered roles within the institution of marriage and the family unit. Gilbert (1993: 10) also addresses this conceptual shift from sex to gender by explaining that gender should instead be viewed as an ‘organiser’ and ‘process’. In relying on Staggenborg’s (1998) notion of ‘gendered organisation’ and Gilbert’s (1993) theoretical premise of gender as ‘process’, I suggest that the family acts as a dynamic social space, a ‘gendered organisation’, where gender identities are navigated through the contestation of gender relationships between women and men. As women engage with their ‘gendered family context’, I argue that their navigations of their individual contexts lead them to construct new gender identities within the family and marriage.

There is a depth of research conducted by feminists documenting the inferior and unequal position of women within the family, whereby studies have examined how the construction and reinforcement of power, gender and patriarchy have informed women’s status, and gendered roles and identities/subjectivities within sites such as family unit and the household (Hartmann, 1987; Pateman, 1988; Coontz, 1992; Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Okin, 1997; McKie *et al.*, 1999). The identification of home, family and the household, as McKie *et al.*, (1999) claim, has informed the complex distinction of public/private division, where private spheres such as the family have tended to propagate gendered divisions of labour encouraging stereotypical notions of women’s work versus men’s work and hence, reinforcing gender differences within private (home) and public (employment) spheres. Indeed, radical feminists have also rooted men’s control of sexuality and patriarchal power

within the gendered nature of the family, more specifically the marriage-based household, where nevertheless, Bradley (2007) claims that family relationships have been altered by other spaces such as employment, which remain significant locations of the social ordering of gender. Ultimately, the most notable change addressed by feminists altering women's positionings and identities within the family unit remains women's access to employment and education, which have engendered new possibilities for women as they contemplate alternative spaces such as education and work (Gilbert, 1993; Bradley 2007). In elaborating on the dual-career family where both spouses are in paid employment, Gilbert (1993) suggests that the underlying assumptions governing this concept have tended to epitomise the relationship between women and men within families as being economically equal, hence promoting the notion of an egalitarian marriage which supposedly enables equality between spouses.

However, social realities illustrate a different picture, although the gender gap in the family seems to be closing due to a lift in women's apparent economic status, nonetheless, women are inherently still considered as holding the 'primary responsibility for the family's daily functioning and well-being' (Gilbert, 1993: 8). Research such as Hochschild's (1989) *Second Shift* addressed the exploitation of women as they overworked within paid employment and within the family simultaneously; as they supposedly achieved freedom through their earnings, housework within the household still remained within the category of 'women's work', hence signifying that even though gendered identities had progressed in work spaces, within the family, gendered identities remained the same. As Delphy and Leonard (1992) claim, women's daily lives remain heavily founded upon caring work, paid employment, as well as the provision of domestic labour within the household; shouldering these diverse responsibilities may hence impact negatively upon women's physical and psychological states. Nonetheless, Hartmann (1987) and Ferree (1988, quoted in Perry-Jenkins, 1994) have argued that the more involved women become in financially supporting the household, hence becoming economically levelled with their husbands, the more chance they have in demanding gender equality within the household.

This notion reflects a direct link between women's economic circumstances, and the impact these could have upon their gendered identities within the home and family life. However, as Bradley (2007) points out, men within families retain economic advantage over women as if one person is expected to stay home so as to mind the children, the family would be 'better-off' if the lower paid earner stayed home; in most cases, this continues to be women. Currently, in the UK, the continuous rise in the cost of childcare is impacting negatively on families and as a result, women can no longer afford to stay in employment as it is financially more viable for families to avoid the cost of childcare in mothers opting to stay

home instead of continuing with their employment careers (*The Independent*, 7 August 2011). These changes remain contributing factors in altering women's position, status and gender identities within the institution of the family. Indeed, even though research (Crompton, 1999) has suggested that the traditional male bread winner image is declining in Britain, Bradley (2007) maintains that traditional attitudes still persist in promoting the structure of the family as inherently based upon the sexual division of labour.

There is also the argument that not all women who are in paid employment demand absolute equality within the household; if women relinquish many of their household task responsibilities, they could find themselves renouncing an important way of demonstrating love, care and concern for their family (Hochschild, 1989; Devault, 1991). Perry-Jenkins (1994: 170) has documented that the family division of labour rests on the fact that the 'unequal division of labour that persists in families headed by heterosexual couples is not a function of innate biological differences between men and women; it is a consequence of how we as a society have come to define what it means to be a "man" or a "woman"'. More importantly, Perry-Jenkins (1994: 170) suggests that this concept of reproducing the social construction of what woman and man entail within the family is comparable to West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of 'doing gender'. Indeed, this analysis significantly reiterates my argument that gendered identities are actively 'performed', a notion I previously discussed (Section 2.3.2) whilst exploring Butler's (1990: 25) concept that 'gender is always a doing'. As Morgan (1999: 30) states: 'family relationships remain one of the major sites where gender *gets done* (my emphasis); gender is not incidental or formally irrelevant to family practices but is built into these practices and routine understandings of them'.

It is upon this premise that I support my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of gender identities within marriage and the family; as the institutions of marriage and family alter, how do young women navigate social expectations and gendered roles within marriage, and how do they exercise independence over their options as they navigate power and gender within the family unit? Indeed, Morgan (1999: 38) maintains that even though the nature of family and households have considerably altered with single-person households in Britain, households must still be viewed as 'contributing to the shaping of gender, just as gender, seen as part of a flow of life interacting with other social distinctions, may be seen as shaping the character of households'. So, as the nature of marriage, the family, and the household alters, how do gendered practices change within them and consequently, in what ways do women generate new gendered identities and subjectivities in relation to these changes? How would my research respondents react to the dilemmas of fulfilling educational and employment careers, as well as ensure that their expectations of gender relationships are met within marriage and family life?

2.4.3 British South Asian Muslim marriages: maintaining ethno-religious identities

The literature on marriage in Britain indicates that divorce and cohabiting relationships are on the rise, where the latter are often regarded as the first step towards marriage, or even defined as 'trial marriages' (Haskey, 2001: 12; *National Statistics*, March 2004). In the UK, cohabitation is increasingly being viewed as an alternative to marriage, especially by younger generations who hold more liberal views on marriage and sexuality (Barlow *et al.*, 2005). People's choice of family structure is therefore clearly changing to accommodate alternative household types which include non-married couples and their children. Nevertheless, despite these social transformations, marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities remains significant and divorce remains low.⁸ Here I contend that the popularity of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities can be explained by the fact that marriage becomes an idiom which supports the maintenance and affirmation of ethno-religious identities. Indeed, religious and cultural affiliations/backgrounds do influence marriage and divorce patterns in the UK, where research shows that people in Britain prefer to marry within their own ethnic group (Modood *et al.*, 1994). In fact, inter-ethnic marriages form a very small proportion (only two percent) of all marriages in the UK and studies carried out in 2001 suggest that people from South Asian ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, were the least likely to marry outside their ethnic group, as opposed to people from Caribbean backgrounds.⁹ This may be explained by the fact that among South Asian groups, various cultural and religious differences distinguish them from each other; marrying within one's ethnic group hence maintains the ethno-religious identity of the group by keeping its cultural purity and specificity (Modood *et al.*, 1994; Basit, 1997; Shaw, 2000).

Based on statistics (*Home Office Citizenship Survey*, 2003), South Asians in the UK outnumber all other ethnic groups in terms of marriage rates; they also have the largest household sizes (married spouses with children) starting with Muslims, followed by Sikhs and Hindus (National Statistics, 2004). In relation to marriage and cohabitation patterns in Britain, data shows that marriage is most popular among Pakistanis, Bangladeshis (mostly Muslims) and Indians (mainly Hindus); alternatively, people who consider themselves as not having 'any religion' are more likely to cohabit rather than get married (*National Statistics*, March 2004). This suggests that there is a link between religion and the degree of importance or value people place upon marriage, cohabitation or family living arrangements. For instance, as suggested earlier, Muslims regard marriage as a religious duty and living with a partner outside of marriage is considered a sin as per their Islamic beliefs. Consequently, previous research has revealed that Muslims, particularly women, who choose to live with partners without being married could be considered as having brought shame or dishonour to the family name within their communities (Bhopal, 1997). Children born out of wedlock may

hence be viewed as stigmas within their specific religious groups. Therefore, as compared to the 'white' British population, British South Asians hold more conservative views about marriage and children than the former and this may explain the high rates of marriage and low rates of cohabitation within British Pakistani/ Bangladeshi communities, and other South Asian communities in Britain.

Nevertheless, Barlow *et al's* (2005) studies on cohabitation in British ethnic minorities also emphasise the fact that young British South Asian Muslims may not totally reject the idea of cohabitation as a 'trial marriage' and claim that there are changes in attitudes around cohabitation, albeit very small, within South Asian Muslim minorities in the UK. Still, respondents in Barlow *et al's* research (2005) maintain that because of religion and family, they would not themselves think of cohabiting before marriage. Nevertheless, the majority of them believe that cohabitation is acceptable for 'white' society. My own study seeks to also look at British South Asian Muslim women's perceptions of why marriage remains an important institution for them and for their communities, as well as seek evidence for some further shifts, like those identified by Barlow *et al.*, (2005), in attitudes towards cohabitation and alternatives to marriage. Do young and educated British South Asian Muslim women perceive marriage as an effective institution ensuring the continuity of ethnic and religious customs? How do they grapple with alternative arrangements, like cohabitation before marriage? I further explore marriage arrangements in the next section by analysing the extent to which cultural values influence marriage patterns in South Asian Muslim communities in Britain; ultimately, I reflect on the possibilities and limitations British South Asian Muslim women may have in exercising agency as they navigate marriage. More specifically, I consider the practice of arranged marriages and forced marriages in Britain in order to illustrate the tensions young women face in their attempts to negotiate marriage so as to generate new gender identities.

2.4.4 Arranged marriages in Britain: agency, choice and consent

Anthropologists have often suggested that marriage is essentially a relationship between groups, rather than individuals. In particular, in comparing women to gifts, Levi-Strauss (1969, quoted in Basit, 1997) suggests that the exchange of women between groups aid in cementing social relationships between them. Here, I argue that marriage, more specifically, the arranged marriage practice within British South Asian communities, could be perceived as a form of cultural transaction, a social signifier promoting specific cultural and ethnic identities which are negotiated and perpetuated through rituals and customs. Wilson (2006) supports this claim is pointing out that the arranged marriage helps to mark the boundaries between communities and castes, where women, in marrying within the

community, become the bearers of family honour within South Asian societies. Hence, the maintenance of ethnic traditions and honour (izzat) usually rest on women (Raza, 1991; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992); within British South Asian Muslim communities, the maintenance of traditional gendered roles, prescribed rules on sexuality and a woman's gender identity as 'respectable' are interwoven within the concept of the arranged marriage.¹⁰ The question remains: how do independent young British South Asian Muslim women navigate the institution of arranged marriage within their communities?

Previous research has demonstrated that the arranged marriage is not a religious precept, but a cultural phenomenon, hence a tradition that is not imposed in either Islamic or other religious scriptures (Bradby, 1999). Nevertheless, Alibhai-Brown (1993) and Razack (2004) argue that the practice of arranged marriage has been stigmatised as oppressive due to the controversial issue of 'choice' in marriage; such stigmatisation of the arranged marriage practice also erects dichotomies of 'love marriage' versus 'arranged marriage', which consequently begs the question of British South Asian Muslim women's agency within the marriage process.¹¹ Studies show that arranged marriages in British South Asian communities are based upon the social and cultural circumstances of the families involved (Fischer & Lyon, 2000; Shaw, 2000 and 2001; Charsley, 2003).¹² For South Asians in Britain, marriage within the family, especially between cousins (consanguineous marriages), maintains the 'purity of the blood', hence strengthening consanguinity with affinity (ties through marriage). Such marriages, which can also be arranged transnationally (for instance between Britain and Pakistan), hence appear to offer multiple routes to support, security and trust, all maintained through the 'biradari'¹³ (Bradby, 1999; Lefebvre, 1999; Shaw, 2000; Shaw & Charsley, 2006; Balzani, 2006).

Indeed, the position of women, and ultimately, their unequal gender status within such marital arrangements has been documented in the literature. For instance, transnational brides face particular burdens and constraints. As Yuval-Davis and Anthias observe, women's responsibility for a family's socio-economic progress through migration also entails promoting the 'notions of tradition and collective identity' (1989: 208-24). Indeed, hardships and immigration problems faced at the hands of foreign husbands bent on deception and dowry fraud remain strong (Yeoh *et al.*, 2005; Menski, 2002). Nevertheless, transnational consanguineous marriages still remain popular in the UK. As British Pakistani women interviewed in Shaw's and Charsley's research (2006) maintain, they prefer husbands from Pakistan as the latter are more likely to respect their culture, practice their religion, and respect elders, unlike British Pakistani men who are perceived to be 'too confident' (Shaw, 2000: 414). Equally, British Pakistani men indicate their preferences for 'traditional' Pakistani women as contrasted to the 'independent, modern, and assertive' British Pakistani

woman. In cases such as these, marriage then emerges as a crucial means of producing and transforming transnational networks; more importantly, the wish to marry someone from South Asia demonstrates that young South Asian Muslims in Britain aspire to maintain ethno-religious identities through marriage. Nevertheless, neither Shaw (2006) nor Charsley (2006) discuss the challenges to such preferred models of marriage, which Ahmad (2001) and others suggest might be the outcome of greater education and economic independence for women. This is an important focus of my research since educated British South Asian Muslim women may have to negotiate such types of marriage proposals. As a result, their negotiations of this marriage process would indicate how their choices in marriage could generate certain long term effects upon their individual, as well as collective gendered identities.

Previous studies by Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991) have noted that arranged marriages in South Asian communities have progressed, both in definition and in nature.¹⁴ The arranged marriage system is not therefore totally rejected but modified to suit young people's contexts. This point is important for my research which investigates how new generations of South Asian British Muslim women, born in the UK and educated to degree level, react to and negotiate concepts such as, on the one hand 'falling in love' and on the other hand, 'arranged marriage'. As Bradby (1999) and Bhopal (1999) claim, the ways in which marriages are contracted are crucial to how ethnic groups regard the distribution of gendered roles and as such, women's manifestation of gendered identities. If the concepts around marriage are changing, it is possible that gendered expected roles, identities and expectations will also evolve. Nonetheless, the underlying controversy with the South Asian arranged marriage in Britain does not inherently lie with the practice per se but with the related notion of forced marriage – a marriage arranged between two people, with the absence of consent and choice. Indeed, the concept of arranged marriage is increasingly being defined today in contrast to the term forced marriage, whereby the former is seen as a distinguishable cultural practice and the latter, as an abuse of women's rights due to their inability to exercise free choice within marriage (Working Group-Home Office report, 2000; Anitha and Gill, 2009).¹⁵

These debates expose the current challenges faced by British South Asian Muslim women as they navigate choice within an arranged marriage; as I argue in Chapter Six, it is the degrees of choice and agency which draw the boundaries between arranged and forced marriages and ultimately, depict the realities young British South Asian Muslim women face as they contemplate marriage. Research has indicated that the complexity surrounding the notion of arranged and forced marriage practices remains in the definition of the terms itself: when is a marriage arranged, when is it forced, and could it be both? Central to the legal conflict arising in English law in recognising the nature of the arranged marriage relates to

issues around consent; the controversial debate is that of consent of the future spouses. Academics, government officials and jurists are right in suggesting that rating consent in the so called 'arranged/forced marriage' is problematic. As Gangoli *et al's* research (2006) portrays, within South Asian communities themselves, the overlap between 'arranged' and 'forced' marriage is in effect recognised. Indeed, the issue highlighted in the arranged/forced marriage debate is that of 'free and informed' consent as opposed to 'coerced' consent in a marriage.

In 2007, the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act was introduced so as to address the concerns for victims of forced marriages by providing a civil remedy called the Forced Marriage Protection Order in Britain.¹⁶ These orders support victims, although reports from organisations have suggested that breaches are common (*The Independent Online*, 21 December 2011). More recently, in October 2011, the British Prime Minister David Cameron sparked debates about whether a forced marriage should in effect be criminalised and hence, become 'a crime in its own right'. This raised the question of whether such a process could encourage more young women to come forward and disclose the abuse they experienced (*The Guardian Online*, 12 October 2011). More importantly, through the protection of the law, could women finding themselves robbed of agency and choice in marriage benefit from such legal enforcement? As Wilson (2006) and Gangoli *et al* (2006) claim, the chances that women report violence and condemn their families are small; due to 'izzat' (family honour), women may 'consent' to marry in order not to stigmatise their families. Nonetheless, according to a previous study conducted on young South Asian women and forced marriages in the UK, the majority of victims of forced marriages who were interviewed affirm that had the forced marriage been a 'criminal offence', they would have had more leverage to 'bargain' and 'negotiate' with their parents and thereby, be in a position to exercise free choice upon their marriage prospects. These women suggest that emphasis should be placed more on the welfare of the victims, as opposed to issues related to the stigmatisation of communities within which forced marriages occur (*The Independent Online*, 21 December 2011). Therefore, the application of criminal law could have a direct impact on the nature of women's negotiations of the marriage process within their families and communities, hence influencing their status and gender identities within marriage, through the degrees of choice and agency they could potentially implement within their negotiations.

As stipulated earlier, Islamic law requires the full consent of both parties to a nikah (Pearl and Menski, 1998); therefore, a forced marriage is technically invalid within Islamic jurisdiction. In Britain, however, studies suggest that a combination of persuasion, if not force, is used by parents and families to bind young Muslims within such arranged matches (Ahsan, 1995; Dustin and Phillips, 2008). Here, I emphasise the complicated status an

arranged marriage holds within Islamic law, where I argue that there is an underlying link between the concept of an arranged marriage and Islamic jurisdiction. Indeed, Islamic family law allows the arrangement of marriage of young people under proxy (Poulter, 1986). This begs the question: would this nikah be considered valid under Islamic law if young women themselves do not consent, but the arranged marriage still goes ahead ‘under proxy’?

As Pearl and Menski (1998) suggest, as far as Islamic law is concerned, as long as all the Islamic contractual elements are fulfilled, a nikah by proxy is considered as fully valid. The concern hence relates to the position of the proxy as someone who has the right to give another person in marriage; the proxy may be acting as guardian and in Islamic law, such a marriage is legally valid. In English law, however, giving someone in marriage and acting as proxy is illegal and hence, the marriage viewed as void. This highlights the controversies and tensions which may arise when English law and Islamic law intertwine and more importantly, depict the challenges faced by South Asia Muslim women in Britain as they navigate the tensions brought about by Islamic and British jurisdiction around marriage. As British South Asian Muslim women, through education and employment, acquire independence and develop agency to understand Islamic teachings and concepts around marriage on their own terms, I aim to examine their perceptions and negotiations of arranged and forced marriages within the context of Islamic and English law, as they attempt to generate new gender identities. How do young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate the concept of ‘choice’ in arranged and forced marriages; in particular, how does the notion of navigating the grey areas of consent and choice in marriage, which link the arranged and forced marriage practice, enable them to exercise agency over their marriage prospects?

2.4.5 Re-workings of the Islamic marriage in multicultural Britain: intersecting jurisdictions

In the last part of this section, I highlight the existing tensions which British South Asian Muslims face, as the institution of marriage is negotiated in both Islamic and British contexts; this throws light on the considerable challenges South Asian Muslim women in Britain face as they navigate marriage and attempt to actively re-work their gender identities and positionings within the Islamic marriage. There have been some voices within the Muslim community in the UK demanding that Shari’a law be adopted for the Muslim community as a whole, within the area of family law (Nielsen, 1991), hence reaching a compromise between two different sets of laws – Islamic and English laws. Menski (1998) has previously defined this process as ‘Angrezi (English) Shari’a law’, which reflects a combination of Islamic customary laws and secular English laws concurrently.¹⁷ More recently, the controversial debates raised by the Archbishop of Canterbury in February 2008

demonstrate the conflicts around the possibilities of merging religious Islamic law within secular British law.¹⁸ Such notions have been previously critiqued by Muslim feminists (Mernissi, 1993; Moghissi, 1999), on the grounds that some tenets would run counter to international human rights law and could exacerbate gender discrimination within the area of family law; for instance, polygamy, the right to unilateral male divorce, the practice of wife-beating if the wife is not obedient to her husband, and under-age marriage could pose difficulties for British South Asian Muslim women's gender status and identities in the advent of such tenets of Islamic law being implemented in Britain.

Although the *nikah*, like a secular ceremony, is also a legal contract, it is not recognised as a valid marriage contract in English law (Poulter, 1986; Ahsan, 1995; Bano, 1999; Pearl and Menski, 1998, Bradney, 2000). In fact, the *nikah* has been declared invalid in the UK on the grounds that it can lead to 'potentially polygamous marriages' (Pearl and Menski, 1998: 274). Therefore, a Muslim couple who merely goes through a *nikah* in the UK would not, in English law, be seen and treated as legally married, although they are viewed as husband and wife according to Muslim law.¹⁹ In cases where Muslims have not gone through the civil marriage in English law and spouses decide to get divorced (or technically separate as they are officially 'unmarried' under English law), they would then be unable to seek legal advice as there would not be any legal documents proving their marital status. This may happen where Muslim women are not British, and are economically dependent on their husbands and in-laws (Pearl and Menski, 1998). Pearl and Menski's research (1998) previously reveals that women are then isolated as they cannot be protected by English law. In the advent of divorce, women's tainted reputation leaves them with no status within their communities.²⁰

Studies have demonstrated that most Muslims in Britain combine the *nikah* and English civil marriage so as to satisfy both legal systems in Britain (Bano, 1999); the majority will consider the *nikah* to be their legitimate form of marriage, but will first register their marriage in accordance with English law (Pearl and Menski, 1998). This may mean that the civil marriage is merely a document which states a status, a piece of paper which is devoid of any cultural or religious affiliation. Studies by Ahsan (1995) reveal that for Muslims in Britain, the *nikah* has more relevance than the English civil registration, even though the pattern of arranging the registration as closely as possible to the *nikah* enables the person conducting the Islamic marriage to be sure that the union is also valid in English law (Pearl and Menski, 1998).²¹ New links are therefore drawn between the secular ceremony and the Muslim contract even though the two are, in theory, kept apart.²² In this case, the civil marriage is viewed as a mere legal obligation which Muslims in the UK, as British citizens, need to fulfil, rather than an actual marriage where couples commit to each other spiritually.

However, the civil marriage is increasingly being viewed as important among the younger generations of Muslims in the UK, especially those who are in higher education (Ahsan, 1995). Ahsan's (1995) findings are interesting and significant, especially in the light of my research as they indicate changes in how young Muslims are progressively accepting or embracing more secular approaches to marriage. Indeed, if the second generation of South Asian Muslim women in the UK is likely to enter into higher education or paid employment and as such, develop agency and choice with regards to how to negotiate marriage, such processes may lead them to regard gender roles in marriage as different and changing, particularly those around Muslim women's roles and status within the Islamic marriage. Therefore, it is possible that as more young British South Asian Muslim women enter educational and work spaces, they could come to confer equal status and value to both the civil marriage and the *nikah*, hence opening up possibilities for generating new gender identities as British South Asian Muslim women.

Research on Islamic law in Britain identifies the point of contention between the two intersecting legal systems as relating to *talaq* and the husband's right to unilateral repudiation. Indeed, the question of the recognition of *talaq* has been made the subject of considerable litigation, culminating in the House of Lords.²³ The dominant argument exposed the inferior position of the Muslim wife on the grounds of sex as the male-centred unilateral Muslim divorce regime discriminates against her gender, and renders her powerless to take any legal action against him. Any *talaq* pronounced in the UK is hence void and will only be considered valid in England only if it is recognised in the parties' country of domicile.²⁴ Muslim women in the UK are therefore legally protected from repudiation. However, Muslim husbands in Britain can still divorce their wives by *talaq*, even though such a divorce is invalid in the eyes of the English courts; he could still pronounce *talaq* and could then behave as though the couple was instantly and effectively divorced, not in English law, but in Islamic law (Hamilton, 1995; Pearl and Menski, 1998). Once a *talaq* is put forward, the wife may feel pressurised to 'accept' it if she believes that in effect, Islamic law requires her to accept the divorce. Consequently, she may then seek a divorce in English law (which she 'consents'), giving the reason that her marriage has broken down irretrievably and that she 'agrees' to be divorced (Pearl and Menski, 1998). As a Muslim wife, she does not have any other alternative but to accept the divorce due to her husband's 'right' (considered as religious) to unilateral repudiation. If in turn, a wife wishes to divorce and manages to get one from the English court, she may still not be free to remarry as without her husband's *talaq* (if he does not agree to grant her *talaq*), she will still be considered married under Muslim law.²⁵ As a result, she will be viewed as single in English law but will still be married under Islamic law. Unless

such issues are taken into account, it is difficult not to see the tensions between English law and Islamic law, especially in areas such as family law.

Cases such as these hence illustrate the complexity of South Asian Muslim women's positionings within marriage in Britain; how does the complex process of merging Islamic and English ideals of marriage contribute to educated British South Asian Muslim women's abilities to navigate both sets of principles? More importantly, the recognition of the tensions which may arise as they navigate marriage aids in our understandings of the challenges British South Asian Muslim women face; however, will education and employment equip them with independence, agency and choice to re-work their perceptions and experiences of the Islamic marriage and the controversial element of talaq within it?

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reviewed the existing literature on South Asian Muslim women, identities and marriage in the UK so as to frame my research questions. I began by elaborating on the current socio-economic contexts in which British South Asian Muslim women navigate spheres of higher education and employment in Britain. As they increasingly choose to embrace alternative life options such as building educational and employment careers, their negotiations reveal women's independence in not only wanting an education but also envisaging marriage post-education. In their quests to build on their educational and employment experiences, young women navigate social class differences and educational backgrounds, as well as actively bargain with families about altering and re-defining expected gendered norms (through culture and religion) of South Asian Muslim womanhood. Indeed, existing literature (Ahmad, 2001; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008; Bhopal, 2009; Dwyer and Shah, 2009) on educated British South Asian Muslim women has demonstrated that women are grappling with discourses around culture and religion so as to develop new gender identities through employment, and the acquisition of financial independence. These studies have also revealed how higher education and employment influence marriage options. For example, Ahmad's study (2001) has hinted how higher education may influence choice of marriage partners while Dwyer and Shah (2009) have shown that financial security, gained through employment, act as a safeguard for women if divorce must be contemplated in the future. However, these studies do not reflect on how the spaces of higher education and employment impact on young British South Asian Muslim women's perceptions and experiences of the institution of marriage as women challenge and re-work the meanings of marriage within their communities.

In this thesis, I therefore attempt to address women's new understandings of marriage as they explore the spaces of higher education and employment. I hence emphasise that their navigations of education and employment expose the possibilities and the limitations they confront as this generation of young British South Asian Muslim women contemplate different life options in order to re-define the position, status and gender identities of women within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain. Indeed, their navigations also indicate that as they exercise increased independence over educational and employment careers, life options such as marriage are influenced. Therefore, I reiterate that the link between women's agency, and their access to education and ultimately, employment, remains potent in the ways it influences marriage options for this group of educated and economically independent British South Asian Muslim women.

Secondly, I focussed on how theoretical perspectives emanating from postmodernist feminist frameworks inform my study. More specifically, I argued that the language of 'difference' and the concept of performativity help in the understanding of women's differing gender identities. I engaged with the scholarship on feminist theory and 'difference' to reflect on the possibility of recognising women's diverse experiences; as such, I relied on the emerging feminist literature that deconstructs the idea of feminism and gender as being predominantly 'white', hence denouncing the Eurocentric bias and acknowledging gender identity formation as being integral to specific cultural contexts. Through this analysis, I noted that discourses on 'race', ethnicity and culture need to be taken into consideration as British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities are studied. More specifically, I argued that Brah's (1996) concept of 'reiterative performance' signifies the articulation of new gendered identities as young women actively exercise agency in negotiating and re-working existing gendered cultural norms. Nonetheless, throughout this discussion on gender identity and 'difference', I have also highlighted that although women's gender identities are flexible and unstable, they remain constructed and contested within racialised discourses. Hence, I signalled the importance of overcoming the notion of Muslim woman as 'category' which Brah (1993) discusses, so as to better evaluate the evolution of women's gendered identities as their lived experiences. In relying on the feminist concept of gender as 'performance', drawn from Brah (1996) and Butler (1990), I stressed how concepts around gender and performativity remain useful in analysing young British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations and re-workings of new gendered identities. Young women's newly acquired independence within educational and employment settings leads them to perform different identities, in turn shaping their approach to other life options such as marriage. Nonetheless, I stressed that the concept of performance also highlights the ways in which gender is a social, cultural and political construct as young women apply individual agency

over their life options. In applying these two feminist frameworks to my study, I argued that through active processes of negotiation, British South Asian Muslim women embrace the diverse possibilities of generating and performing new gender identities through the spaces of education and employment.

Thirdly, I suggested that marriage remains a significant site within which women's gained independence (through education and employment) is mediated. I illustrated this argument through my analysis of the institution of marriage in both Islamic and British contexts. The institution of marriage acts as crux for British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of gendered identities; through independence gained through educational and employment spaces, the possibilities of embracing and performing new gender identities through the re-evaluation of marriage options denote women's empowerment. Also, in building on the feminist theoretical constructs of gender within the institution of marriage, the family and household, I reviewed how feminist literature has documented the unequal status and gender rights of women within the family and marriage. Defining the family as a 'gendered organisation' (Staggenborg, 1998) which has historically and socially relied upon the sexual division of labour to function, I argued that the challenges remain potent as educated and economically active British South Asian Muslim women contest and construct new positionings and gender identities within the institution of the family, in their attempts to embrace egalitarian gender roles within it.

Recognising that marriage acts as a site enabling the maintenance of ethno-religious identities within British South Asian Muslim communities, I reflected on how notions around agency, choice, and consent inform practices such as arranged and forced marriages within these communities. Even though young South Asian Muslim women in Britain perceive marriage to be important, they are in effect contesting its preference by actively negotiating choice within the marriage process. Although the customary practice of arranged marriage and cousin marriage are still popular within their communities, they are ready to challenge fixed cultural gendered norms so as to ensure that personal marital expectations (based on more equal gender roles) are met. More importantly, in conjunction with the arranged marriage, the debate about forced marriage in Britain highlights that firstly, the degrees of choice within arranged matches must be acknowledged and that secondly, a forced marriage is un-Islamic as consent and choice in marriage remain strict stipulations of the *nikah*. Young South Asian Muslim women in Britain remain aware of their Islamic right to choice in marriage, contesting, and re-working their options in order to affirm new gendered identities as they navigate the marriage process. Nevertheless, despite such activism, I highlighted the complex link which exists between arranged marriage, forced marriage and Islamic jurisdiction as far as 'marriage by proxy' (within Islamic family law) is concerned. I reiterated

that it is problematic to assume that the validity of a nikah rests solely on consent and choice; indeed, I argued that it is still possible to uncover overlaps between the concept of forced marriage and ‘marriage by proxy’. If young British South Asian Muslim women’s marriages are arranged, to what extent do they exercise agency over the marriage process and consequently, how does this process impact on the evolution of their gender identities?

This thesis, in focusing on educated British South Asian Muslim women, endeavours to develop new understandings of gendered identities and marriage in Britain. Therefore, the research questions I aim to cover in this thesis are:

- As young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate spaces like higher education and employment, are new gendered identities generated?
- To what extent do British South Asian Muslim women develop new understandings of marriage through their experiences of higher education and employment?
- How are their new understandings of marriage shaping the negotiations of marriage expectations of British South Asian Muslim women?
- What meanings do these young women attribute to the institution of marriage within their communities; do their negotiations enable them to generate new gender identities as they navigate cultural, ethnic and religious gendered norms attributed to marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities?
- What is the relevance and importance of both the nikah (Islamic marriage) and the civil marriage for South Asian Muslim women living in Britain as they re-work their expectations of marriage within Islamic and British frameworks?

¹ Notions around, and meanings of the ‘family’ and ‘household’ have altered considerably across time (Staggenborg, 1998; McKie et al., 1999; Barlow *et al.*, 2005). I therefore acknowledge that there can be various forms of family as well variables in household types, for instance, single parent families. Nonetheless, in this thesis, I use the term ‘family’ and ‘household’ to mean a marriage-based relationship between heterosexual couples.

² It was not until 1753 that a civil marriage service became essential in England (Goody, 1983). From the twelfth to the mid eighteenth century, the Christian Church in England had the power to decide who could marry and how marriages were to be performed (Ingram, 1981; Gillis, 1986; Brooke, 1981; Davies, 1981; Outhwaite, 1981; Macfarlane, 1986; Mansfield and Collard, 1998). The fundamental principle of marriage before the mid-eighteenth century was that provided that no basic impediment to marriage existed, an indissoluble bond was created between a man and a woman solely by the verbal expression of consent of the parties. Such verbal consent was accompanied by the giving of a ring and other rituals. This survived the Reformation in England and was only minimally altered in the post-Reformation religious canons of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ingram, 1981).

³ In pre-Islamic tribal societies polygamy and divorce had been in existence for centuries. The Prophet recognised the difficulty in radically changing the tribes’ social and cultural lifestyle and therefore allowed polygamy and divorce under certain conditions while trying to increase women’s rights. A man in Islam is allowed to enter into polygamy as long as he has only four wives at a time, getting rid of the unwanted one by divorcing her. However, a man can only take a second wife if the first one is barren or if the husband resides in a geographical location where women greatly outnumber men. But no matter what the conditions are, under polygamy, no man can marry more than once unless he can treat all his wives with justice and equality (Eposito, 1982; Singh, 1992). Indeed, But, asserts the Qur’an pragmatically, “You will not be able to deal equally between your wives, however much you wish (to do so)” (Q. 4:129); another verse states: “If you fear that you will not be able to do justice then marry only one” (Q. 4:3) See Ali (1988).

⁴ The Qur’an has six thousand verses, about seventy of which deal with personal law. Ten verses deal with marriage, twenty-five with divorce, five with fornication and adultery and ten with the maintenance of divorced wives and widows (Pickthall, 1985).

⁵ This explains why the application of Shari’a law around the Muslim marriage (nikah) is so diverse cross-culturally and internationally (Mernissi, 1991; Moghissi, 1999). Indeed, Islamic law has been altered in most Islamic countries so as to better serve the needs of contemporary society (for example, in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and African/ Balkan countries amongst others) (El-Solh and Mabro, 1994; and Pearl and Menski, 1998). Some countries such as Tunisia and Turkey have gone as far as to abolish Shari’a law in order to embrace secular law and policies. In European countries like the United Kingdom, where there is an ethnic Muslim migrant minority, this minority has to negotiate between

secular law and Islamic law. Indeed, the literature on Shari'a law in the UK surrounding debates about Muslim minorities being granted multicultural group rights versus democratic/liberal universal laws of a secular nation shows that British Muslims develop unique ways in negotiating between Muslim law and secular law (Poulter, 1995/1998).

⁶ Repudiation must be done in front of witnesses for the divorce to be valid (Minai, 1981; Singh, 1992). However, this practice started in early Islam and was practised by both men and women, thereby defining a more equal gender relationship between wives and husbands (Mernissi, 1987). Today, only husbands are allowed to repudiate their wives. A wife can never be sure that her marriage would last as she could be repudiated (divorced) without knowing it. Just as she could suddenly learn that her husband has taken a new wife without her knowledge as he is not obliged to say so.

⁷ Muslim law requires the obedience of the wife in marriage. However, what exactly constitutes obedience and disobedience is subject to interpretation and depends to a large extent on the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the parties. However, the obligation of the husband to maintain his wife does not commence immediately after the marriage as certain conditions have to be fulfilled after which the wife will be entitled to maintenance. The conditions are as follows. The wife must be (i) be prepared to have conjugal intercourse and must obey all reasonable commands by her husband; (ii) She must have attained puberty. If a wife gets into debt and the husband is not at fault, she loses her rights to maintenance. However, she should still be receiving maintenance in cases such as (i) the failure of the husband to provide mahr/dower on her demand; (ii) when she is not able to cohabit with her husband due to illness; (iii) when her husband leaves the matrimonial home to establish another household; (iv) when she goes on pilgrimage to Mecca and (v) when the marriage cannot be consummated owing to the husband having not attained puberty, or being ill (Diwan, 1982).

⁸ Divorce in this context means the termination of any civil marriage registered by the state. However, within British Muslim communities, it is possible that husbands divorce their wives by repudiation (divorce in Islamic law-talaq), although this practice is not legally recognised in English jurisdiction. As Pearl and Menski (1998) suggest, there may be numerous cases where Muslim husbands divorce their wives in Muslim law and these cases would remain unknown. Furthermore, in cases where only a nikah and no civil marriage registration has occurred, it remains difficult to know about divorce rates in Muslim communities in the UK.

⁹ More specifically, only three percent of Bangladeshis, four percent of Pakistanis and six percent of Indians married a partner outside of their ethnic group (*National Statistics*, March 2005).

¹⁰ Bhopal's (1999) study on the arranged marriages of women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent in East London reveals important notions on British South Asian women's experiences (both educated and non-educated) in these marriages. She concludes that the arranged marriage remains an oppressive

and patriarchal practice in which women from ethnic minorities in the UK have no choice but to conform to their parents' and communities' pressures, demands and traditions.

¹¹ Arranged marriages are seen as an 'alien' problem by non-South Asian communities in Britain. Because marriage is based on an 'arrangement' between two families of potentially equal social status and wealth, marriages are rarely labelled as 'love marriages' as it is assumed that people do not have the agency to choose their future life partner, as opposed to the Europeanised concept of 'falling in love' before marriage. The latter celebrates the notion that a personal intimate relationship should exist before a couple decides to get married, while the former regards marriage as a religious obligation in which chastity before marriage is important (Ballard, 1978). However, an arranged marriage may be remembered as a time of love and romance in cases where couples fall in love before the rishta is arranged by the families, approached 'along with some trepidation, anticipation and romantic expectation' (Mines & Lamb, 2002: 8). Romance, as Shaw and Charsley (2006) stress, is thus compatible with arranged marriage, even though the relationship between husband and wife is not generally the primary factor that motivates marriages between transnational cousins.

¹² Arranged matches are made through 'rishtas'. Rishtas usually take place in one's own caste, in an attempt to preserve cultural, caste and lineage purity (Rao & Rao, 1982; Donnan, 1985). The traditional criteria of spouse selection and kinship organisation of South Asians in the UK follows the same pattern as that in India and Pakistan (Bachu, 1985; Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996). In terms of transnational consanguineous marriages, Islamic principles, and the Islamic cultural tradition of marrying within the extended family are taken into consideration (Charsley and Shaw, 2006); often, Muslims in the UK justify their preferences for close kin marriage by referring to Islam as they suggest that the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima was married to Ali, the Prophet's cousin (Bisit, 1997).

¹³ The concept of the biradari denotes one's closest relatives living locally. More generally, it may mean all other relatives in Britain and the homeland, and at its broadest, refers to all caste members, ties and descent between contemporaries (Alavi, 1972; Shaw, 2000).

¹⁴ Indeed, in the 'traditional' pattern, the elders of the family and the parents select a spouse for their children. In the 'modified traditional' pattern, the young person has some power to decide on the outcome of the proposal arranged by the parents, and has the right to decide whether or not to go ahead with the marriage. The 'cooperative traditional' pattern entails that either the parent or the young person is able to make the selection, with each other's approval. Bisit's (1997) study also shows that Muslim women in Britain are given more opportunities to meet their fiancés and go out with them before the wedding, as compared to women in Pakistan or Bangladesh. My research (Abdool Raman, 2005) on South Asian Mauritian women and arranged marriages in Mauritius demonstrates similar trends. Women from my study came up with the term 'semi-arranged marriage' as opposed to a

‘typical arranged marriage’ (Abdool Raman, 2005: 54), which also reflects Pilcher’s (2006) use of ‘assisted marriage’ to depict more ‘modern’ versions of the arranged marriage.

¹⁵ Research indicates that forced marriage predominantly affects women of South Asian origin (FCO and Home Office, 2005, quoted in Anitha and Gill, 2009: 167). Also, organisations like Southall Black Sisters (2001) and Newham Asian Women’s Project (2007) report that there are around 450 to 1,000 cases of forced marriage a year (quoted in Anitha and Gill, 2009: 167).

¹⁶ Government officials in the UK had previously made it clear that parents who force their children to marry will be prosecuted, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity or religion. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2000), with the Home Office (2000), report on forced marriages mentioned that the British government would be taking action against families who try to involve their children into marriages they do not consent.

¹⁷ I refer here to ‘English’ law as Scottish laws may be slightly different from laws in England. However, the conflicts that may arise when Islamic law and English law coexist will be similar to those in Scottish legislation. I concentrate on England as my study is based in England.

¹⁸ In 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that the introduction of certain aspects of Shari’a law could help in the maintenance of ‘social cohesion’ in Britain, thereby stating that Muslims should not have to choose between the stark alternatives of cultural loyalty or state loyalty’ (BBC News Online, February 2008).

¹⁹ In English law, a Muslim marriage entered as a nikah can only be recognised as legally valid if it was entered into outside the UK.

²⁰ Their future then depends on the willingness of the husband to provide for them until they financially re-established themselves. Indeed, under English law, the husband will not be obliged to support his wife as their nikah has never been legally valid (see Poulter, 1986). However, under Muslim law, the husband has to support the wife for a period of three months (iddah) so as to establish pregnancy. These cases are unofficial and are therefore not given any legal recognition. In situations of disputes over property and the custody of children, they then have to rely on family members and Muslim community leaders, or mosques for support (Pearl and Menski, 1998).

²¹ Some mosques require the married parties’ documentary evidence of their marriage registration before they are allowed to undergo the nikah.

²² This is in contrast to the experience of other South Asian ethnic groups in Britain. Hindus, Jains and Sikhs incorporate the secular ceremony within their own religious rituals (Menski, 1987/1988/1993).

²³ In the judgment in *Quazi v Quazi* (1979). See Poulter (1986).

²⁴ Talaq will be void even if spouses are UK residents or have been in the UK for more than a year, unless talaq is approved in a third country (not the country of origin).

²⁵ Muslim women may feel bound in conscience to seek effective termination of their Muslim marriage before they remarry. Fear of accusations of ‘zina’ (extra-marital sexual relationships) may be a reason in this context.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I highlight the methodological approaches I utilised during fieldwork so as to answer my research questions. Here, I expand on how feminist methodologies and research strategies inform my study of British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities as the spaces of education, employment and marriage are negotiated. More specifically, I reflect on the ways in which the methodological tools I utilised remain useful in the analysis of my key research questions:

- (1) As young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate spaces like higher education and employment, are new gendered identities generated?
- (2) To what extent do British South Asian Muslim women develop new understandings of marriage through their experiences of higher education and employment?
- (3) How are such understandings shaping the negotiations of marriage expectations of British South Asian Muslim women?

So as to answer these questions, I firstly focus on the theoretical aspects involved in the feminist methodologies I have chosen for my study. My research is informed by feminist standpoint theory and the feminist politics of difference. In essence, the recognition that gendered identities and knowledge production remain fluid and 'situational' is the premise of my methodological approach. I explore the feminist issues which are relevant to my thesis, where I pay particular attention to the relationship which exists between the researcher and the researched. For example, concerns of who speaks for whom, boundaries of 'sameness' and 'difference' experienced by interviewers and interviewees, as well as the power dichotomies which remain imminent to the research process.

Secondly, I reflect on my research design and strategy as I began fieldwork. In this section, I elaborate on my research sample and my experiences of the recruitment process of research participants. Thirdly, I look at the methodological tools employed to gather data for my research including participant observation as well as qualitative in-depth individual interviews. Here, I focus on my experiences as a participant observer on university campuses/workplaces as well as the issues I encountered as I carried out my individual interviews with research participants. Also, I briefly discuss how I tackled the ethical

considerations I encountered in my research process, with a particular focus on how sensitive issues may have affected the research process for both the researcher and the researched. Finally, I provide an overview of the key characteristics of my research participants.

3.2 FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Feminists, although diverse in their beliefs and positions, claim that social theory has been male dominated. Jackson (1998) argues that social theory and knowledge production are gendered and gender is a marker of social differentiation in most societies. Feminists need to therefore build on methodologies that can go beyond the omnipresence of the masculine subject and the male researcher. Feminism as a concept enables feminists to understand the gendered lives of women. Since the 1970s, gender, as a term has been used to explain culturally constructed femininity and masculinity (Jackson, 1998). Hence, to understand gender relations in women's lives means to understand how the social reality of women is conceptualised (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Indeed, DeVault (1996: 32) claims that the purpose of feminist methodology is to 'reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many lives invisible'.

Feminist methodologies should hence involve a number of important aspects. They should concentrate on the social construction of gender and inequality through theoretical analysis, social action and observation (Cancian, 1992). They should examine how 'race', gender, economic/social class and sexuality influence women's lives. Feminist methodologies should also recognise 'situated knowledges' so as to uncover differences amongst women's voices and experiences of their gendered social lives (McDowell and Sharp, 1999: 262). In practice, this means that feminist methodologies must allow for differences in women's voices positionalities as they recount their experiences. Thus, the concept of 'situated knowledges' encourages individual women's circumstances to be uncovered. For instance, Jackson (2006: 529) claims that feminist methods should be based on testimonies which question issues such as 'who is spoken to, how they are spoken to, what expectations are held about who can speak on behalf of others, what can be voiced and how meanings are understood' (Jackson, 2006: 529). Therefore, in listening or observing women in feminist research, 'feminists can use any method, but how they use them may be distinctive' (Jackson, 2006: 529).

Feminists agree that standpoint theory may be useful to analyse women's experiences (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Although there are debates about what a feminist standpoint, as a notion, signifies, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 64) suggest that

the concept that 'women speaking their truth results in new knowledge of women's gendered social lives, grounded in women's experience' remains central to notions of feminist standpoint. As such, taking a feminist standpoint means 'women voicing their experience' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 65). According to Jackson (2006: 531), to have a 'feminist standpoint is to have that understanding of life which comes through struggles of being disadvantaged'. Standpoint theory then becomes a useful approach to understand women's gender inequalities and gendered identities within the social or political contexts in which they evolve. Standpoint theory also allows for differences in women's positionalities, whereby knowledge can be achieved by 'starting with women's experience' (Cancian, 1992: 633).¹

Concepts of 'otherness' explain the differences among women's identities and experiences. They have been taken up within both Western and non-Western feminist discourse (Mohanty, 1991; Spivak, 1988; Khan, 1988). The experiences of 'otherness' and differences encountered by women who live in, or experience different contexts have highlighted a number of issues. For instance, struggles over who can speak about what may also involve dominant bodies exerting force to keep 'others' silent. In fact, Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) claims that Europeans produced stereotypical depictions of other cultures as 'an Other to a Western norm' (Mills, 1998: 98). Said questions the ethics and politics of western academics in representing subordinated peoples against the norm of those in power; these representations have 'enframed and staged the Orient for Europeans' (Mohammad, 2001: 103). Indeed, the Orient has been framed as the passive and exoticised 'Other' (Parry, 1992) due to such essentialism. In the study of gender, gendered identities have similarly been essentialised through the assertion of a singular conception of 'woman' within the Western feminist movement (hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1991).

These debates raise the question of how particular social relations of difference have been constituted and consequently, about what women do have in common across their differences (Collins, 1990; Mirza, 1997). Feminists therefore recognise that the category 'woman' is not universal and hence not a fixed self. Apart from the theoretical definitions of 'otherness', researchers also face the complexity of understanding shifting relations of difference in practice (Hall, 1992; Spivak, 1988). Those who are collectively being seen as the 'other' by the researcher can be divided into multiple power relations which are found within diverse social/class divisions, ethnic groups, community and religious affiliations (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). For example, in the context of my research, defining the 'South Asian Muslim' woman in the UK proved problematic as there are numerous divisions among South Asian groups (variation by language, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, caste, generation). It was also possible that those who were socially located in

the same category feel differently about similarities or differences that exist between themselves, and themselves and 'others'. Indeed, participants had different experiences of what it feels like to be included/excluded or embraced/subordinated. As such, they could experience being 'other' or 'same' in different ways.

This complex intertwining of difference or similarity and definitions of the 'other' affect how the researcher and the researched are positioned in dominant or subordinate positions in relation to varied subjective 'selves' and 'others' (Bhopal, 1997). These interrelations of difference and similarity for both the researcher and the researched are defined by postmodern theory as not fixed but ambivalent. Based on this principle, it may be possible to navigate between the 'same' and the 'other' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Navigating between the 'same' and the 'other' then creates hybrid identities which challenge fixed and binary oppositions that in turn define the research process as dynamic. Power between the researcher and the researched, although unequal, is also given new meanings in terms of agency (Bhabha, 1996). In the case of ethnic minorities in Europe, ambivalence encourages the researcher not to view their differences as a static 'other', but as selves negotiating multiple identities across differences and similarities within wider social and political contexts. In the following section, I elaborate on why I have chosen the two feminist methodological approaches (standpoint theory and the politics of difference) as frameworks informing my research.

3.2.1 Using feminist methodological standpoint theory and the politics of difference in my research: managing difference, sameness and positionality during fieldwork

Approaches in standpoint theory and the politics of difference/'otherness' inform my research in two ways. Firstly, they both focus on the concepts of women's differing identities, positionalities and experiences which can be useful in my research. Secondly, they exemplify the claim in my research that young educated British South Asian Muslim women's notions and experiences of the meanings of marriage and identity can be different to the experiences of young educated non-Muslim British South Asian women from other ethnic minority groups, or to young educated British white women. Furthermore, these approaches recognise that 'womanhood' as a concept is not universal but diverse, thereby emphasising that women's experiences are different.

My research assumes a feminist standpoint of difference so as to look at South Asian Muslim women's notions of marriage and identity in the UK. Acknowledging the claim that Western feminism has had a tendency to define the non-West as the 'Other' is important to my study. Indeed, British South Asian Muslim women, although evolving in a

western context, are viewed as 'different', 'non-white' or 'ethnic'; women, though British, who are still viewed as belonging to specific cultural ethnic/religious groups 'outside' of British white society. Western feminists have often ignored the differences between women and are hence guilty of cultural colonialism in silencing non-Western women's differing voices (Mills, 1998); in fact, they have been accused of treating 'woman' as universal, hence essentialising them and ignoring differences among women. By the 1980s, 'third world women' were being classified (by western White middle-class feminists) as a unified category. They were seen as the 'other', oppressed, subordinated and powerless, hence leaving Western feminists with the power to produce feminist knowledge and history (Mohanty, 1991; Spivak, 1993; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Furthermore, Haggis (1990) claims that the gendered dimension of the 'Other' has either been essentialised or ignored. In the case of feminist research encompassing Muslim women's experiences, Muslim feminists (Mernissi, 1975; Moghissi, 1999) and Islamic feminists (Mojab, 2001) also claim that positionalities are diverse. Indeed, Khan (1998: 465) suggests that the notion of the 'Muslim woman' must also be seen as grounded within Muslim women's differences in experiences, which are not 'static or definitive', but dynamic.

In fact, the debate between universalism and cultural relativism with regards to Muslim women's rights remains a thorny issue within feminism (Okin, 1998; Macey, 1999). This point remains relevant to my research as it touches on the ways in which Muslim women not only experience culture and religion, but also their positionalities in negotiating between cultural or religious social practices (such as marriage), which are inherent to their identities. For instance, universalist feminists claim that the granting of certain cultural or religious groups rights to particular ethnic minorities may be damaging to women.² In relation to Muslim women's rights, some Muslim feminists claim that universal concepts of women's rights as human rights must be embraced regardless of individual differences and contexts (Mernissi, 1975; Ahmed, 1992; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Moghadam, 2002). Islamic feminist movements, on their part, argue that cultural relativist attitudes lead Muslim women to embrace the complementary gender roles between women and men as prescribed by Islam. Consequently, women who wish to follow Islamic rules claim that Islam provides them with agency or empowerment to lead fulfilling lives (Hoodfar, 1991; Povey, 2001). The recognition of varying and differing positionalities informing the expression of religion and culture hence lies at the core of my research. Acknowledging differences in women's perceptions hence shape the methodology of this study as it recognises that gendered identities are embedded within diversity.

Understandings of gender, sexuality, and gendered identities therefore remain grounded in religious/cultural beliefs that draw on different axes or understandings of

culture, religion, 'race' and ethnicity. I needed a methodological approach which was sensitive to how British South Asian Muslim women experience their gendered social realities in relation to marriage and identity, which are also influenced by particular political, cultural and religious concepts. Indeed, there would be variables in their positionings. I was also conscious of the fact that the gendered roles or 'traditions' prescribed by Islam, which young women's families have been practising for generations in their countries of origins, might themselves be undergoing transformations in a context like the UK. This perspective shaped my research strategy in the sense that I was aware of the fact that participants could be experiencing different changes at different times. I hence thought it appropriate to conduct qualitative interviews, thus giving ample space and time to interviewees to narrate their perceptions freely.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

3.3.1 Fieldwork Context

Research Sample

My fieldwork took place over a year, from August 2009 to August 2010. I based my fieldwork within the Yorkshire and Lancashire regions. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I also considered London as part of my research sample as I anticipated that in London, the range of participants might be more diverse, where different ethnic or social class backgrounds could be identified. On the other hand, the sample from Yorkshire and Lancashire could be more homogeneous and less diverse. I contended that a comparative study between locations such as Yorkshire, Lancashire and London could be interesting in offering the possibility to explore a broader range of Muslim women's experiences and identities. However, as I predominantly relied on the snowballing method to recruit research participants, it remained more practical to stay within the Yorkshire and Lancashire regions where I then lived, hence shifting the focus of the research sample on Northern England instead.

As previously mentioned, Muslims form the largest ethnic minority group in the UK and the majority of Muslims in the UK are of South Asian origin. They are of Pakistani descent, followed by Bangladeshi and Indian (Modood *et al.*, 1994).³ Most research participants were of Pakistani origin, followed by Indian and Bangladeshi descent. This reflected the demography of recruitment sites. I thought it probable that I encounter African Asians (possibly Ugandan and Kenyan) while recruiting participants; however, my research sample does not include women from these ethnic backgrounds.⁴ I sought respondents who had all of their education in the UK and were educated to the higher education level. All

respondents in this study were aged between 18-30 years of age. Although I interviewed women from different South Asian ethnic backgrounds and diverse social class milieus/economic backgrounds, the common ground between my research participants remained access to higher education, paid employment and Islam.

In devising the research strategy, I sought to recruit women who were still in full-time education and those who finished university and had graduate jobs. I also sought to recruit unmarried and married respondents so as to understand women's perceptions and experiences of marriage and gendered identities. I believed that it could be beneficial to the study to compare and contrast participants' opinions from a range of respondents. I thought that such comparative studies can be useful in three ways. Firstly, they generate understandings of how married versus unmarried Muslim women experience or view marriage. Secondly, they help to investigate whether education has really made a difference in altering young women's views about the meanings of marriage, gendered roles and identities. Thirdly, they explore the ways in which views/meanings of marriage and identity have changed or not changed for participants who have already made the transition from university and are now either working full-time, part-time or are not working at all.

For those who were still studying, participants' opinions were based on current views/aspirations and the future positions they hope to achieve. For those who were already in paid employment, participants reflected on their views/aspirations they may have had at the time when they were still studying. They were also in a position to simultaneously draw on the differences and similarities that they may have experienced during the transition years (transition from university to employment or unemployment or other). It was therefore interesting and useful to have these two different sets of participants' views to compare and contrast. Such comparative research strategy generated rich and valuable data for valid and credible analysis of my research topics. In the next section, I recount my experiences of recruiting research participants for my study.

Recruitment

As I started my fieldwork, one of the most difficult tasks was to find research participants to interview. Initially, I used university campuses as sites for recruitment. Participants were busy studying or working; getting people to agree to talk to me for about two hours proved daunting. Nevertheless, through a few personal contacts, I managed to meet potential students who agreed to participate in my study. With the help of friends, I distributed hand-outs about my study on campuses so as to ensure women were made aware of my study. I started to network with students at The University of Leeds, whereby I was

introduced to other students from neighbouring universities (The University of Bradford etc). I spent the first few weeks of fieldwork (2009) speaking to students who were part of South Asian/Islamic student societies at university. I attended these societies' meetings regularly so as to maintain existing contacts as well as build new ones; after weekly meetings, I developed better rapports with women and I was introduced to their friends. Nevertheless, recruiting participants who were active members of Islamic societies lead to a specific group of women who publicly manifest their Islamic faith/affiliations and hence, their religious identities. These women, for instance, adopted similar dress codes, such as the hijab (with jeans or salwar kameez), as well as in some cases, the jilbab (full body covering, including the headscarf). For this group of participants, dress codes represented an important part of how they performed their gender identities on campus. However, even though women presented particular trends in clothing, the diversity and differences of opinions they articulated demonstrate that this group of women are far from being homogenous and conformist.

However, despite this evidence of diversity, I was concerned about the limitations of this approach to recruitment. In order to diversify my research sample, I attempted to recruit participants not only through Islamic societies but also pursued other snowballing techniques. I used social networking sites as another avenue to recruit research participants; *Facebook.com* appeared to be the most popular amongst students so this is where I started. In fact, I was surprised to see the number of student groups using social media such as *Facebook.com* (for example groups such as *British Muslims and Bloody Proud of it*, *British Asian Sisterhood*, *Leeds Muslim Youth Forum* amongst others) to actively post and blog views about Islam, women's rights, identities and the hijab in the UK. More importantly, 'administrators' (people responsible to manage these websites) remained university students from Leeds, Bradford and Manchester. I hence emailed some 'administrators', who gladly accepted to talk to me as they thought that research such as mine would help to promote positive understandings of Islam in the UK. As a result, 'administrators' asked me to write a summary of my research (Appendix Ten) so as to distribute to other members of their groups-this proved to be very successful as students emailed me, wishing to express their perceptions about related issues.

As for the recruitment of women who were already in paid employment, I also initially relied on the snowballing method. Having a few friends working as medical practitioners in the Yorkshire and Lancashire medical deaneries helped me enormously in meeting other women working within the medical profession. However, so as to try and overcome the bias of having interviewees concentrated solely within the medical profession, I contacted NGO's, organisations dealing with ethnic minority groups, as well as local

South Asian grocery shops/clothes stores in Yorkshire and Lancashire. These were useful in helping me approach young women for the research. Voluntary organisations working with South Asian ethnic minority women in Leeds were useful in establishing contacts.

For instance, particularly, *Nari Ekta* (www.nariekta.org.uk), *Asha Neighbourhood Project* (www.aspiretosucceed.org.uk) and *Get Away Girls* (www.getawaygirls.co.uk) remained the most responsive. I effectively obtained positive replies from them, whereby some women who already graduated from university and were working within these organisations readily agreed to participate in my study. I was invited by *Getaway Girls*, an organisation focused on promoting higher education for young ethnic minority women to talk about my project with young women who were interested to consider higher education as an option. This provided me with invaluable space to define the contours of my study, where I answered women's questions about my academic path, independence as a South Asian woman, as well as notions about Islam.

Recruiting participants therefore proved to be difficult in the beginning but access became easier as my fieldwork unfolded. In effect, my recruitment methods impacted on the nature of my research sample in particular ways. My sample is largely reflective of a group of British South Asian Muslim women who were part of particular social groups (ISOC-Islamic Society), were enrolled in science or medical courses, as well as being graduates practising as medical practitioners and related fields (science fields). Indeed, the profile of the graduate participants I recruited indicates that my research sample mirrors a particular segment of professional (working) Muslim women. This sample group reflects the limits of my research strategy; having a wider variety of Muslim women graduates from different employment backgrounds could have provided different data for my study. Nevertheless, having graduates coming from similar employment backgrounds or study courses is an effect of my research strategy. Indeed, due to snowballing, women recommended to participate in my research by previous respondents shared similar professional (career) or study course interests.

My research sample was hence shaped by my recruitment strategy, which affected the validity of my findings in different ways. Reflecting on the strategies used to recruit my research sample, it is clear that they shaped my sample in distinctive ways. Using the Islamic Society meant that ten women from my sample were active members of the Islamic Society, compared to the remaining twenty participants. However, as I suggested above, the women I interviewed expressed diverse views and it was clear that those who were active members of the ISOC were not homogeneous or narrowly conformist in their views. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that my respondents may have

been anxious to portray views that were either ‘Islamically normative’, or were cautious not to depict Islam in a bad light. I recognise this possibility but do not see it as problematic in the arguments presented here. All respondents were positioned in particular ways. In my analysis in the following chapters, I show reflexivity in how I deal with the comments from different respondents.

3.3.2 Research Methodology

I planned to use different methodological tools so as to collect a richer set of data, ensure a multi-dimensional perspective on the subject and avoid a one-sided view of the issues. Previous studies of South Asian women in Britain suggest the use of combined methodological tools. For example, Bhopal’s (1999) study on South Asian women and arranged marriages in Britain comprises the use of in-depth interviews with participant observation. Similarly, Dwyer’s (1999) study on British Muslim girls and identities used interviews and group discussions as methodological tools. In fact, Michell (1999) suggests that combining individual interviews with focus groups is a good way to research young people’s experiences of their social worlds. In relation to her research on young people and social hierarchies, she claims that focus groups can facilitate the exploration of mutual experiences and identities. They can also be revealing in terms of who is speaking and who is silenced, and why, during the focus group discussions. She goes on to suggest that it was individual interviews which allowed the in-depth exploration of young women’s experiences.

Initially, I intended to use both individual interviews and focus group discussions to explore women’s differential notions of marriage and their opinions/experiences of gendered social roles. Combining these two methods might have helped to generate different types of information. However, as my fieldwork unfolded, I realised that focus group discussions remained impractical and unrealistic to devise as students and respondents who were in paid employment had different schedules at university and at work. Also, the information I obtained from my one-to-one interviews with participants generated rich data. Furthermore, attempting to discuss sensitive topics like sexuality, virginity and religion communally could be problematic in large groups of respondents. I thought that such sensitive issues could perhaps be better explored in individual interviews where it is possible for participants to feel more at ease to talk about personal aspects of their lives in full confidentiality. I set up a few pilot interviews with women to test how participants would respond to my research questions, and whether I could obtain relevant information within the allocated hours of interviewing. My pilot interviews proved

successful in generating considerable data and I hence decided to adopt in-depth individual interviews as my main research methodological tool.

However, as I approached personal contacts to kick-start snowballing, I was invited to student parties and organisations on university campuses which gave me the opportunity to network and meet potential interviewees. I attended several Muslim students gathering both at the University of Leeds and the University of Bradford as they organised talks on Islam and group discussions about Muslim youth in the UK. This enabled me to be involved, as a participants' observer, in young Muslim women's social activities on campus, hence making it possible to implement participant observation into my research design. In effect, I finally explored the possibilities of participant observation as a qualitative methodological research tool in order to gather data for my study. Below, I elaborate on how I managed participant observation and qualitative interviews during my fieldwork.

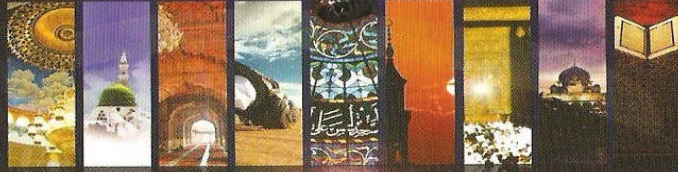
Participant Observation

As a Muslim of South Asian origin, I found that as a researcher, I was easily accepted by student communities which focused on religion and South Asian culture as common grounds to form and maintain links on campuses. In attending their gatherings, I became a participant observer and this helped me gain an understanding of women's social realities within higher educational settings. This included participating in cultural and religious events and functions (Eid Party/Iftaar Parties marking the end of the daily fast during Ramadan/fundraising for Charity events). This helped me negotiate access to students coming from diverse educational fields and also facilitate snowballing in the sense that these students had older siblings and cousins who were either still at university or had graduated and were working. At the beginning of my fieldwork, being based in Leeds city, I attended Fresher's Week at the University of Leeds so as to personally sign up as a member of the Islamic Society as well as South Asian societies promoting dance, culture and the Arts. I realised that there were two Islamic societies-the ISOC (Islamic Society) and the ABSOC (Alhul Bay't Society), the former a Sunni organisation and the latter a Shi'a based organisation.

In fact, I signed up for both of them and this gave me the chance to approach both presidents and get involved as they planned their yearly significant events on campus. The ISOC yearly organises the 'Discover Islam Week' while the ABSOC plans the 'Ashura Awareness Week'. Being a participant observer generated interesting data concerning the promotion and maintenance of Islamic identities on university campuses; activities, games, charity events and talks about Islam added richness and depth to my understanding of how

Muslim youth operates on campus, and evolves within higher educational settings. Below, I include a few examples of the hand outs distributed at the 'Discover Islam Week' 'at the University of Leeds.

LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION ISLAMIC SOCIETY



Discover Islam Week

Evening Talks

MONDAY

16th

1001 Inventions Muslim Contribution to the world, Rupert Beckett LT, 6-8PM

TUESDAY

17th

Islam vs Terrorism
Rupert Beckett LT, 6-8PM

WEDNESDAY

18th

Me, Myself and Islam, Muslim women panel, Rupert Beckett LT, 4-8PM

THURSDAY

19th

Converts to Islam
Yorkshire Bank LT, 6-8PM

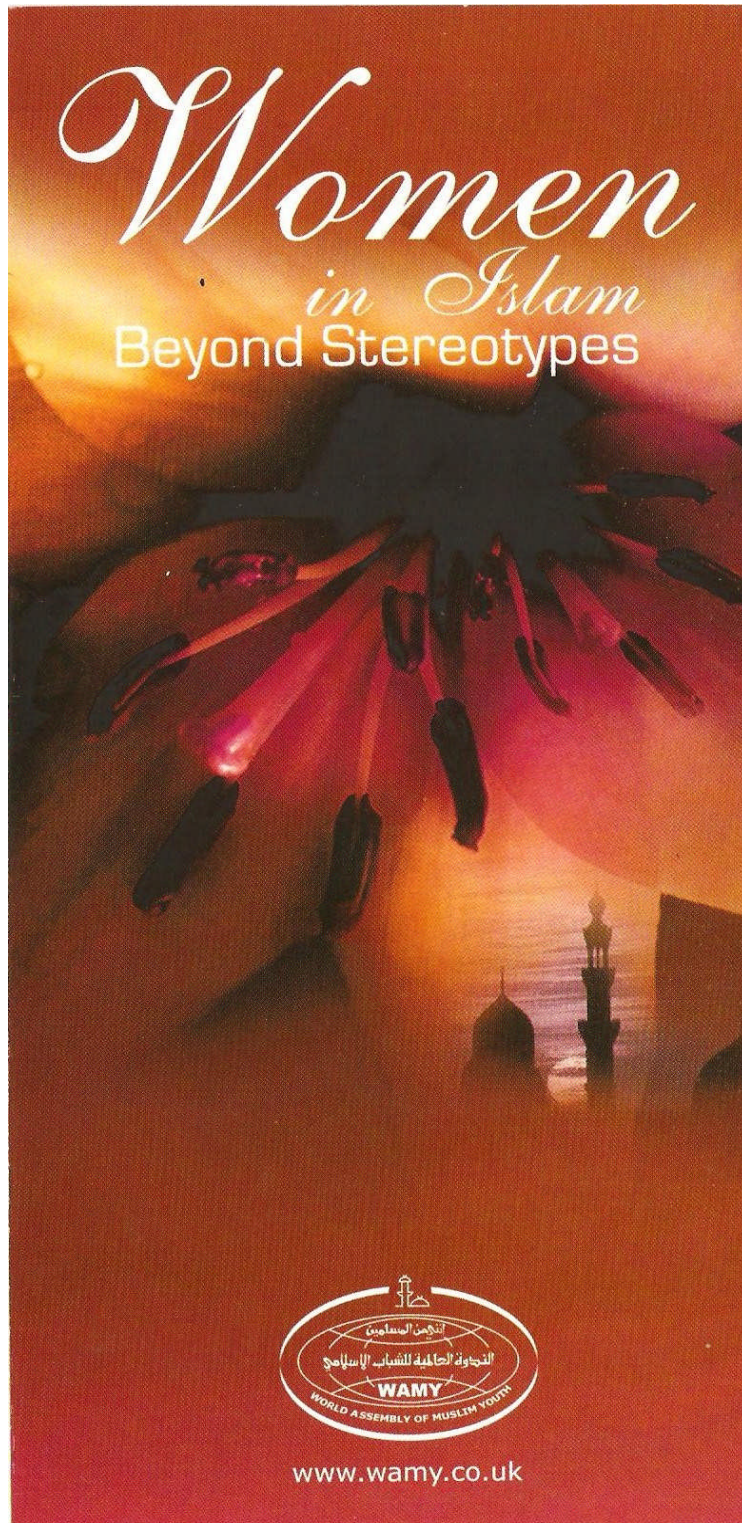
FRIDAY

20th

From Mecca to Jerusalem
Rupert Beckett LT, 6-8PM

stalls • talks • exhibition • henna • food • calligraphy

Picture 1: Evening Talks, 'Discover Islam Week', ISOC, The University of Leeds.



Picture 2: Women in Islam: Beyond Stereotypes, 'Discover Islam Week', ISOC, The University of Leeds.

Women are taught from early childhood that their worth is proportional to their attractiveness. We feel compelled to pursue abstract notions of beauty, half realizing that such a pursuit is futile.

When women reject this form of oppression, they face ridicule and contempt. Whether it's women who refuse to wear makeup, shave their legs, or expose their bodies, society-both men and women-have trouble dealing with them.

In the Western world, the hijab has come to symbolize either forced silence, or radical, unconscionable militancy. Actually, it's neither. It is simply a woman's assertion that judgment of her physical person is to play no role whatsoever in social interaction.

Wearing the hijab has given me freedom from constant attention to my physical self.

Because my appearance is not subjected to public scrutiny, my beauty, or perhaps lack of it, has been removed from the realm of what can legitimately be discussed.

No one knows whether my hair looks as if I just stepped out of a salon, whether or not I can pinch an inch, or even if I have unsightly stretch marks. And because no one knows, no one cares.

Feeling that one has to meet the impossible male standards of beauty is tiring and often humiliating. I should know, I spent my entire teenage years trying to do it. I was a borderline bulimic and spent a lot of money I didn't have on potions and lotions in hopes of becoming the next Miss World.

The definition of beauty is ever-changing; waifish is good, waifish is bad, athletic is good - sorry, athletic is bad. Women are not going to achieve equality by putting their bodies on display, as some people would like to have you believe. That would only make us party to our own objectification. True equality will be had only when women don't need to display themselves to get attention and won't need to defend their decision to keep their bodies to themselves.

"Allah has promised those who believe and do good deeds that for them there is forgiveness and a mighty reward." Qur'an 5:9

For further information please visit:
www.iisna.com/pamphlets or (+961) 3 9354-7500

the **hijab**

reflections
by muslim
women

learn
the
basics

www.iisna.com/pamphlets

Picture 3: The Hijab, 'Discover Islam Week', ISOC, The University of Leeds.

Participation observation enabled me to find participants for my study, as well as helped me to contextualise my interview findings. Throughout my fieldwork, and whilst doing participants observation, I kept a research diary so as to keep a steady record of my findings. As a result, I came to be known as the ‘PhD researcher’ writing on Muslim women, education and marriage. Participant observation led me to understand how Islamic societies from different universities interact with each other and politically mobilise to invite Muslim scholars from Muslim Councils all over Britain to deliver lectures on Islam, terrorism and Muslim women’s rights on campus. In fact, the tension between the Islamic societies (ISOC and ABSOC) at the University of Leeds campus was glaring. They were kept separate and each organised specific activities to support their members. The president of the much smaller ABSOC reiterated her concerns to me about how the ISOC monopolises funding and space on campus for events, which appears to be a pattern on other university campuses, such as the University of Bradford.

Qualitative interviews

In this section, I reflect on the use of qualitative interviews in my research. In the research process, ‘a qualitative research interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest’ (Kvale, 1996: 2). An interview is a ‘pseudo-conversation which must have all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching for it to be successful’ (Goode and Hatt 1952 cited in Letherby, 2003: 82). The interview is also described as a site in which power relations operate in complex ways, with the social positioning of interviewers and interviewees based on class, age, status and sexual orientation influence interview dynamics as well as a study’s theoretical underpinnings (Nast, 1994). In order to gather reliable and valid knowledge of the social world, the focus of an interview must be geared towards the interaction between the researcher and the researched. Although based on the conversations of daily life which may appear to be informal, the research interview remains a professional conversation where ‘the sharing of personal information becomes a conscious act’ (Mohammad, 2001: 107).

Therefore, the purpose of any qualitative interview is to obtain qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subjects with respect to interpretation of their meaning. However, understanding the nature of conversational realities means understanding the ways in which meanings are constituted through historical, cultural, social and political negotiations/ interpretations. Kvale (1996) claims that because we exist in a conversational circle, our understanding of the human world depends on conversation and our understanding of conversation is based on our understanding of the human world. In other

words, research interviews have to be contextualised within specific material social worlds (usually those of the subjects) so that researchers can make sense of/interpret the narratives given by research participants that are generated for the production of knowledge. This claim is mirrored by feminist researchers who affirm that to facilitate access to women's lives and subjectivities, researchers have to inquire 'whose story the interview is asked to tell, who interprets the story, and with what theoretical frameworks' (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 11).

In elaborating upon feminist methodologies within social science, Maynes *et al* (2008: 16-21) suggest that women's experiences of their social contexts have often been analysed through categories such as 'race', gender, social class and sexual orientation. As a result, Maynes *et al* (2008: 16) argue that these frameworks lead to 'human agency being reduced to social position', where 'understandings of the relationship between the individual and the social remain superficial'. Such analyses tend to reduce research participants' social experiences as being fixed. In contrast, in-depth interviewing, more specifically, oral narratives, offer research participants space to relate personal life histories within their particular socio-cultural contexts, where stories 'emerge from their lived experiences over time and in particular social, cultural, and historical settings'. Hence, some feminists claim that soft qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews are more appropriate for feminist research as women are able to tell their own stories in their own words. Within feminist research, the oral narrative process is then viewed as qualitative research 'on' women, with a desire to make sense of women's lives and experiences (Anderson and Jack, 1991). More importantly, narrative interviews and the analysis of written texts in feminist research have to recognise differences and similarities in women's life experiences and identities that are weaved around language, culture, 'race' or sexuality (Etter-Lewis, 1991). They should also be in a position to relate women's oral narratives within the larger context of how womanhood is represented in social structures so as to understand how the 'narrative self' describes and defines itself in society (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991: 78).

The use of oral narratives in research indicates positive outcomes; firstly, it opens up the wider possibilities for researchers to understand their interviewees' agency and positionalities from the 'inside out' and secondly, it enables researches to bridge the analytical gap between the individual and the social by allowing researchers to contextualise personal experiences within specific social, cultural and historical events (Maynes *et al.*, 2008: 16). Oral narratives hence comprise two aspects: the self and the social sphere, and the cultural representations of women as shaped by the societies in which women who are being interviewed live (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). These encourage the researcher to regard the meanings of oral narratives as not essentially grounded in dialogue but also in social

experience. In the context of my study, understanding young British South Asian Muslim women's differing personal experiences within their particular socio-cultural contexts proved vital in my analysis of their evolving gendered identities as the spaces of education, employment and marriage were negotiated.

I set up one-to-one interviews with all participants. Most interviews were conducted on university campuses in private seminar rooms, with only a minority conducted at the participants' homes. The interviews were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions covering the main research topics of my interest (Appendix Three). When devising my interview questions, I relied on a plan of some main research topics I wanted to cover in my study (Appendix Two). I intended to keep the interviews as open and as informal as possible, more like a dialogue than a formal situation. All interviews were discretely tape recorded (after having obtained the consent of participants to do so); I was hence able to maintain eye contact with my interviewees instead of having to take notes throughout the interview process, thereby rendering the interview more like a conversation. At the end of some interviews, I realised that some participants felt tense or anxious because they had been open about personal and emotional experiences. I offered them time to reflect on their situations. However, the majority of participants felt that the interview experience was quite enriching in them being able to talk freely about their life's experiences, more specifically, about Islam and their views on marriage. At the end of each interview, I therefore allowed a few minutes for debriefing and asked participants whether they would like to add anything else. Some of them reiterated the questions they found most interesting and felt free to further discuss the issues they thought needed more clarifications.

Operationalising concepts and analysis

The key themes I focused on in my interviews (Appendix Three) were higher education, identity, marriage, Islam and gender. I classified my interview questions broadly along these themes so as to find out why participants are entering into higher education, and how they position themselves, in terms of identity, within educational and employment settings. The interviews focused on the ways in which young women perceive their educational and employment experiences and aspirations, as well as their recount their expectations of marriage. Instead of asking directly about gendered performance, I was alert in my analysis to indications of how my respondents articulated and understood contradictions in the ways in which they presented their own decisions and experiences. I tried to encourage them to reflect on ways they had made certain choices, and listened carefully to what they told me about what factors shaped their decisions. Of course, I also noted when respondents were more specific about the self-conscious ways in which they

presented themselves, or felt they had to present themselves. My participant observation notes were also extremely useful in adding to this material, as I noted the ways in which negotiations were being made, particularly around dress.

The questions I was interested to cover in my interviews were: firstly, how are young British South Asian Muslim women exercising independence over their options so as to generate new gender identities within educational and employment spaces? More specifically, I firstly touched on issues such as the benefits of education, the financial freedom which comes with being into paid employment, family negotiations to get into higher education, as well as the motivational factors pushing young women to increasingly consider educational and employment careers as alternative life options. Secondly, I set out to evaluate respondents' new understandings and expectations of marriage as they explore the spaces of higher education and work; how do the agency and the independence gained at university and work enable these young women to develop new expectations of marriage and consequently, aid in the development of their gendered identities? As women negotiate education and employment, and consequently, develop new meanings of marriage, I sought out to assess how the active processes of contestation and negotiation impact on their gender identities. For instance, as young women negotiate 'choice' in marriage, in particular, the arranged marriage, how do their navigations of the marriage process help them to define and construct new meanings of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities? What challenges do young women face as they attempt to re-work new meanings of marriage as educated and economically independent British South Asian Muslim women?

These were the main areas I covered in my interviews. I taped all the interviews, each lasting between two to two and a half hours. The interviews were then transcribed by myself. I summarised each transcript and these summaries provide individual narratives which help to understand respondents' social contexts (Appendix Ten). So as to visually identify the ideas emanating from my key themes and how they relate to each other, I drew mind maps; one was devised to have a general overview of the thesis, whilst the three others were drawn to grasp the main threads of my empirical chapters (Appendix Seven). As far as the coding process is concerned, I initially started to code the data manually. I then utilised the software Nvivo8, designed for qualitative analysis, where I developed a list of codes relating to my key themes. I provide a full list of codes, as well as an example of a coded transcript in Appendices Four, Five and Six.

Individual interviews in the context of my fieldwork

Using individual interviews as research methodology affected my study in both positive and negative ways. My research encompasses sensitive issues like family relations, gendered female roles, sexuality and religion. I suspected that participants would feel more comfortable in revealing their concerns and notions about marriage (and sexuality) in one-to-one interviews. My interviews provided me with detailed sketches of women's narratives based on their experiences and their perceptions. Open-ended questions also allowed participants to describe as freely and as precisely as possible what they experience and feel, and how they act. Starting with straightforward questions around education or work experiences may put participants more at ease and build up their confidence. Once they felt comfortable, I moved on to more personal questions around relationships, sexuality and marriage.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were an efficient means of collecting qualitative data as they are focused on specific themes that direct the research while also providing participants with enough leeway to formulate their opinions. This approach also attributed some power to the interviewee. It helped maintain a more balanced power dynamic between the researcher and the researched. I also think that individual interviews aided me to deconstruct any essentialist/stereotypical or collective views I may have had of the topic as participants were providing me with unique and individual 'private' opinions. Indeed, Kvale (1996: 33) claims that the in-depth interview attempts to gather descriptions of the relevant themes of the interviewee's life world that are 'rich and presuppositionless as possible'. Kvale (1996: 33) describes such presuppositionless as a 'deliberate naïveté' which encourages the researcher to be open to new and unexpected phenomena.

However, individual interviewing as a methodological tool also has its shortcomings (Kvale, 1996). Participants' statements could sometimes be ambiguous and this implies several possibilities of interpretation. In such cases, contradictory or different meanings reflected inconsistencies that I (the researcher) had to deal with. This might have affected the objectivity of the research. Interviewing is also criticised for being too person-dependent and explorative and hence, unscientific. A common worry is that different interviewers will come up with different interviews and therefore eliminate the need for uniformity in the research process. Individual interviewing is hence claimed to focus too much on the individual and neglects the person's embeddedness in social interactions. As a way to counter this concern, I always ensured that I understood the interviewee's social and personal contexts as I conducted the interview. Also, I believe that participation observation

of women's social realities has helped me contextualise and understand the implicit social maneuverings of daily life.

In researching young British South Asian Muslim women's notions on marriage and identity, I intended to look for depth rather than breadth of knowledge. As mentioned before, doing qualitative research by focusing on women's experiences and differences has its pros and cons. However, my research took as standpoint that truth, objectivity and knowledges may be different and diverse for different women cross-culturally. Furthermore, the use of oral narratives in my research was beneficial in uncovering women's experiences/life histories which were not only revealed in dialogue but which were also placed within wider social, cultural, political and religious contexts. As such, I think that the individual in-depth interview remained probably the best option available to look into women's opinions and experiences in my research. In the following section, I elaborate on the research process by reflecting on how I managed issues around positionality during fieldwork.

3.3.3 Managing power and positionality: the 'insider/outsider' dualism in research

Feminist standpoint theory recognises the power dynamics that take place between the researcher and the researched, and how and why such power dynamics influence the research process or the production of knowledge within feminist research. Skelton (2001: 90) claims that whilst fieldwork is conducted, it is important to acknowledge the existing 'differential power relations' between the researcher and research participants. The differing positionalities and identities of both the interviewer and research participants highlight the complexities of the research process, whereby it becomes necessary to identify the power relations between the former and the latter so as to ensure that strategies are developed (by researchers) to achieve reflexivity as research is conducted (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). The term 'reflexivity' is used to explain attempts to render visible the power relations that exist in the research process, raising questions about the ethics of who is entitled to research particular topics (England, 1994; Valentine, 2002; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). As power between researcher and researched is managed whilst participants' diverse social experiences are being analysed, reflexivity 'opens up possibilities for negotiation over what knowledge claims are made, for whom, why and within what frame of reference' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 119). As Valentine (2002: 118) claims, power relations between the researcher and the researched are unequal and unethical if the researcher plays the role of the 'omnipotent expert extracting information from the passive subject'. Rose (1997: 113) defines this kind of relationship as a 'reflexive landscape of power', claiming that the ways in which feminist writers have conceptualised power relationships in the

research process means that ‘the relationship between the researcher and the researched can only be mapped in two ways: either as a relationship of difference, articulated through an objectifying distance, or as a relationship based on sameness, which is understood as the researcher and the researched being in the same position’. As a result, ‘sameness’ may become linked to authenticity within the process of knowledge production, thereby addressing the balance of power relations between the interviewer and interviewee.

Throughout my fieldwork, I felt that the power relationship between myself and my research participants remained dynamic. Although I was the one with a tape-recorder and a clip-board, it was also evident that respondents had power in withholding any information they did not want to share with me, or also had the possibilities of withdrawing from the interviews altogether. I relied heavily on their genuineness of opinion in order to be in a position to produce a thesis and it happened that respondents put the same questions to me. Consequently, because I wanted to maintain a non-hierarchical tone to my interviews, I answered and revealed, to some extent, personal information to ensure a fair exchange of views. Indeed, Mullings (1999: 340) argues that the boundary and power relationship between the researcher and the researched is a dynamic process which creates ‘positional spaces’ where the researcher and the researched encounter transitory shared spaces. These spaces are then informed by identity-based differences and similarities between the researcher and the researched. In other words, their positionalities are not fixed but fluid identities in the research process. This is because the production of identities must be seen as relational characters which fashion particular performances of social interaction between the researcher and the researched.

It is therefore important that I address my positionality in my research. I am a non-white, partially practising Muslim⁵, middle-class, non-Western feminist with a Western education. I am from Mauritius, an ex-French/British colony which is today a republic. Mauritius is a multicultural, democratic republic, of which the majority of the population is of South Asian descent. As a Mauritian Muslim woman of South Asian origin, whose education has been influenced and molded by British/European academia, I was culturally sensitive to both Western and non-Western feminist literature. This is because firstly, I am focusing my research on women from a non-white ethnic minority group living in Britain and secondly, I can identify with both the West (through Western education and exposure) and the non-West (through South Asian culture and Islam). As such, it was inevitable that I negotiate ‘positional spaces’ based on sameness and difference during my fieldwork.

A study on identity, ‘othering’ and ‘otherness’ conducted by Mohammad (2001) involving British Pakistani women highlights a similar conflict in having to navigate

between the West and the non-West and hence, having to negotiate 'positional spaces'.⁶ She argues that in relation to her research methodology, she confronted her social positioning as an 'insider/outsider' dualism within the research process. Indeed, the relationship of the researcher and the researched may be mapped by either difference or sameness, or both. She describes the 'insider/outsider' ('Same' versus 'Other') boundary as 'marking an inside from an outside, a boundary that is seen to circumscribe identity, social position and belonging and as such marks those who do not belong and are hence excluded. I was seen to be marked by my colour, which set me apart from 'white' society, while positioning me elsewhere, as part of an Asian community' (Mohammad, 2001: 101). Positionality, transmitted through the 'insider/outsider' border, is therefore fluid, whereby the researcher's and research participants' identities remain dynamic throughout the research process. As Hopkins (2009: 6) suggests, the 'inability to fully know our positionalities could encourage researchers to realise the importance of the research they are carrying out and the methods they are using'.

I anticipated that while conducting my fieldwork, I would similarly encounter the 'insider/outsider' boundary in sharing some common cultural/religious traits with my research participants. This social positioning can have its advantages and disadvantages. In experiencing sameness (based on commonality in experiences), the researcher may be better equipped to understand the researched's reality and hence 'produce authentic and moral authority to personal history' (Mohammad, 2001: 104). For the researcher, the underlying assumption of being an 'insider' is that the researcher may produce a more accurate interpretation of informants' responses. Indeed, many feminists draw on their own biographies when collecting and analysing data while others acknowledge that the 'self' is a resource for helping to make sense of the lives of others (Letherby, 2003). However, the researcher's positionality as an 'insider' can also have the effect of making the researcher appear too close for comfort, hence making women wary of sharing information. The 'insider' status of the researcher has also been criticised as a dangerous form of essentialism as it naively assumes connections between the researcher and the researched based on physical attributes such as 'race' and sex (Kobayashi, 1994).

In contrast, 'outsiders' are assumed to have more cultural baggage to deal with during fieldwork (Valentine, 2002). Notions of the 'insider/outsider' dualism may hence suggest that because the relationship between the researcher and the researched is at risk of being reduced to social categories such as gender or class, such social identities are then somehow inevitably seen to be fixed or frozen (Valentine, 2002). Therefore, based on the notion of fluid 'positional spaces', truth claims regarding women's experiences are not necessarily universal, objective and neutral (Mohammad, 2001; Mernissi, 1991; Kandiyoti,

1991). All knowledges remain hence embedded, situated and partial, with the risk of being biased (Harding, 1991; Bhavnani and Haraway, 1994). As Stanley and Wise (1993, in DeVault, 1996: 41) suggest, 'different standpoints will produce different knowledges'.

These differences will therefore influence the ways in which knowledges or meanings are analysed and interpreted. Given the dynamism of the research field and the complexity of the researcher's and the researched's identities, 'truth claims can hence only be grounded in a real recognition of the limitations of vision and knowledge, and the existence of multiple truths' (Mohammad, 2001: 113). In carrying out research on young British South Asian Muslim women, particular attention had to be paid to the politics of difference so as to understand that knowledge and experience can generate multiple truths that do not necessarily have the same value. Indeed, instead of asking 'is this true?', it is more useful to ask 'which/whose truth?' is being told (Mohammad, 2001: 113).

During fieldwork, as a researcher, I shared positionalities of 'sameness' and 'difference' with my research participants. In terms of educational qualifications, shared religion (Islam) and cultural background ('Asianness'), I was probably viewed by my research participants as 'same'. For participants who were still studying at university, I was not merely viewed as a researcher but also as a Muslim 'student' who was conducting research on other Muslim students. On the other hand, graduate participants who were in paid employment often expressed the wish to enroll into postgraduate courses so as to pursue further degrees such as Masters degrees, MBAs and PhDs. In terms of 'difference' between me and my research participants, there were language differences. Unlike British South Asians who may still be speaking ethnic languages at home so as to maintain cultural traditions, in my generation, Urdu, Hindi or Arabic are no longer spoken within South Asian communities in Mauritius. The common ground in terms of language and communication between me and my research participants was hence English only.

Furthermore, differences in dress codes also created spaces of 'sameness' and 'difference'; some Muslim women were dressed like me (jeans/t-shirts/tops), while some were wearing headscarves with jeans or skirts, and others the 'salwar kameez'. At all times, I tried to maintain a somewhat neutral approach to dress codes; as Bhopal (1999: 39) maintains, the 'research situation requires the researcher to reflect upon her/his behaviour, mode of conduct and dress', hence highlighting the significance of the 'presentation of self' within the research process. During fieldwork, it was appropriate for me to wear jeans and shirts as I thought it important to blend in with students at university. However, I ensured that I never wore clingy tops/shirts as this would have been considered inappropriate in

places like interviewees' homes, or the Green Room (prayer room provided for Muslims) at Islamic Societies (ISOC) on university campuses.

My own positioning as a Muslim woman is the area where I felt research participants would relate to the most, whether on a 'same' or 'different' level, or both. At the time during which I was conducting my interviews, I was engaged and cohabiting with my partner, a non-Muslim (Hindu) South Asian Mauritian. To some extent, I felt weary about research participants enquiring about my status. Indeed, as an unmarried Muslim woman living with a non-Muslim man, who is writing on marriage and Muslim identities, I suspected that there might be circumstances where research participants would disapprove and hence, feel critical of my positioning. I felt that this could affect the research process as research participants might not be willing to talk about aspects of their personal lives with someone who 'looks' the 'same' but is nevertheless, 'different', even though we may share the 'same' religious affiliations. However, in the very rare cases where participants did enquire about my status, relationship or living arrangements, I disclosed this personal information. While some participants were surprised of my choice of marriage partner (non-Muslim), others questioned me further about my background and the occurrence of mixed marriages in my family. I thus remained conscious of my positionality and carefully managed notions of 'sameness' and 'difference' between my participants and me so as to avoid representing essentialist or stereotypical notions of women's opinions, views or experiences. Furthermore, my perceptions and positionality influenced the research material and shaped the ways in which I analysed knowledges produced during fieldwork.

For instance, as a participant observer on university campuses, I noticed an obvious division between Muslim women who wore the hijab and those who did not wear it. Very often, after having conducted a few interviews, I 'hung out' in the Green (The University of Leeds) so as to meet women and make new contacts. It remained obvious that women without the hijab were not welcomed by those who chose to wear it. As a participant observer, I believe that I was able to view the tension -because I was mostly regarded as a 'researcher', I felt that students regarded me as 'neutral' as they attempted to understand my positionality. My very presence in the Green Room signified that I was Muslim. Nevertheless, due to me not wearing the hijab and sitting in the Green Room's café, I felt I was being judged by students who did not know me personally. As I raised the question of the hijab in my interviews, I was not surprised when interviewees without hijabs expressed that they felt 'threatened' and 'judged' in entering the Green Room; some of them felt they could not even use the rooms to pray or socialise as peer pressure to adopt the hijab as dress code became an issue for these women. In fact, in some of my interviews, I did not even have to ask these participants about their views on the hijab as respondents would

themselves initiate discussions, and express their feelings about the hijab on university campuses.

Interpreting the diverse intersections of identities and biographies through axes of sameness and difference remain difficult, and the researcher's positionality and power imbalances in the research process are controversial issues. As Valentine (2002: 125-6) claims, despite an emphasis in feminist methodological debates about the importance of acknowledging our positionality or redistributing power between the researcher and the researched, in reality, the research process is beyond the understanding of the researcher. However, this does not mean that researchers should forget the notion of reflexivity. They should instead realise that knowledge production is not static but is a fusion of different identities, performances and positionalities weaved around difference and sameness. Indeed, feminist research does not help to uncover the 'pure and uncontaminated truth'. However, it should be respected for what it does do: provide another way of seeing the world' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 158).

3.3.4 Ethical considerations

Informed consent

Before starting any interview with research participants, I obtained consent (verbal and written) from each and every participant who was willing to take part in the study. They were all given a consent form with a summary of my study and were given time to read it, ask questions and sign it (Appendix Nine). I also asked them whether they agreed that the interview be taped. Participants were told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Before starting my interviews, I briefed them about the overall purpose of the research and the main features of the design, as well as any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project.

Sensitive issues

The information I hoped to gather for my research were at times very sensitive. It happened that some participants found it difficult to talk about issues around marriage, gender and religion; more specifically, I felt that some participants felt distressed around issues relating to divorce and polygamy. It happened that after such interview situations, I started wondering about the effects which my research might have had on these respondents; in these cases, it is fair to acknowledge that emotional involvement in the research process cannot be totally avoided, especially when difficult situations are being described or recounted. Indeed, I suspected that one of the most sensitive research topics

was to get participants to talk about sexuality, relationships or difficult family relationships. I was aware that some of the issues uncovered by the research might render participants emotional and this might give rise to the need for support and advice. Where necessary, I provided participants with contacts from the university's counseling support services, or any other organisation that offers support for women. All participants were also informed of the strict confidentiality of the research and the fact that they would remain anonymous throughout the research process. All the names I have used for my research participants are pseudonyms, utilised to protect the confidentiality of my research participants.

Reciprocity

I was aware that in the process of doing research, participants gave a lot of their time and goodwill in providing me with information. I believed that it was fair to reciprocate their compliance and co-operation. As the interviews were conducted at university, I offered interviewees either coffee or lunch, which in fact, aided in rendering the interview experience less formal and hence, provided space for flexibility and freedom of expression. I held the majority of interviews at university cafes, in seminar rooms at university or workplaces, with a minority held at my interviewees' homes. Through all my interviews, participants felt generally at ease and it was very rare that I had to prompt respondents for more answers or views. Respondents were extremely co-operative and most of them indicated their genuine interest in my research as they felt they were given the chance to speak about their personal views on matters they considered important in their lives: Islam, education, and marriage. More importantly, some of them reiterated that they felt gratified that their views were in fact considered to be valuable for research, and that the 'conversation' made them reflect on pertinent issues they were experiencing daily in more critical ways. I will therefore send respondents a summary of the research findings and if they wish to see a copy of the thesis or particular chapters, I will arrange to send them an electronic copy.

3.4 PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

For my study, 30 women of South Asian origin were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. The chart below demonstrates the age ranges of respondents. The majority of women (25) were single and they were studying, working or doing both. All five married women were in full-time employment and economically active at the time of interview. From my sample, 16 respondents claimed they were from working-class backgrounds and 14 from middle-class backgrounds.

In the bar chart below, I illustrate respondents' age category:

- 10 respondents fell in the category 18-21 years of age
- 13 respondents were older than 25 years of age
- 7 respondents were aged between 22-25 years of age

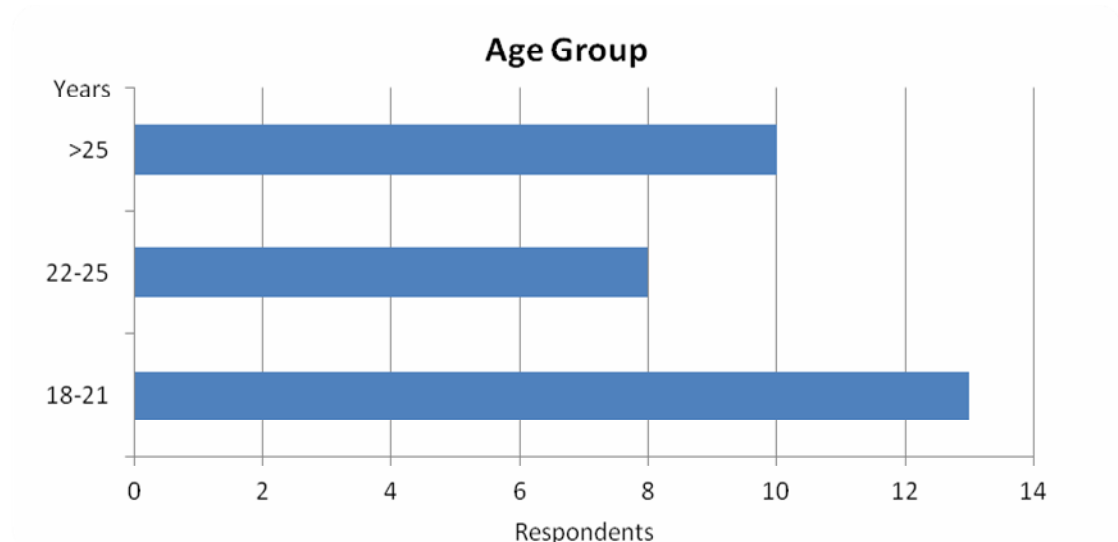


Chart 1: Age Group of Respondents.

In this sample, the majority of respondents were not married. 23 respondents were single; 1 respondent was engaged twice and another engaged once. They both broke off their engagements. 1 respondent was engaged (to British Pakistani) and 1 respondent was in a relationship. 5 respondents were married, 2 of whom had transnational marriages to Pakistani nationals.

Ethnic origin

Ethnic Origin	Number of respondents (n=30)
Indian	2
Pakistani	25
Bangladeshi	2
Mixed (Indian-Pakistani)	1

Table 1: Respondents' ethnic origin.

Respondents in my research sample were of South Asian descent, namely from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. 25 respondents were of Pakistani origin and came from different regions, both rural and urban in Pakistan (Mirpur, Kashmir, Punjab, Lahore and Islamabad). 5 of them came to the UK when they were five or below the age of five. 2 respondents were of Indian origin (Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh). 2 respondents were of Bangladeshi descent (Dhaka) where one respondent came to the UK aged 5. Only 1 respondent was of mixed origin-Pakistani and Indian. As I expected, the majority of my research respondents' ethnic origin was of Pakistani origin due to the concentration of Pakistani ethnic minorities in the Yorkshire and Lancashire regions.

Locality

My research was carried out in Northern England and most participants were born and grew up in the Yorkshire (Leeds and Bradford area, and suburbs like Harrogate, Keighley, and Batley) and Lancashire (Manchester, Halifax and suburbs like Oldham, Altrincham, and Rochdale) regions.

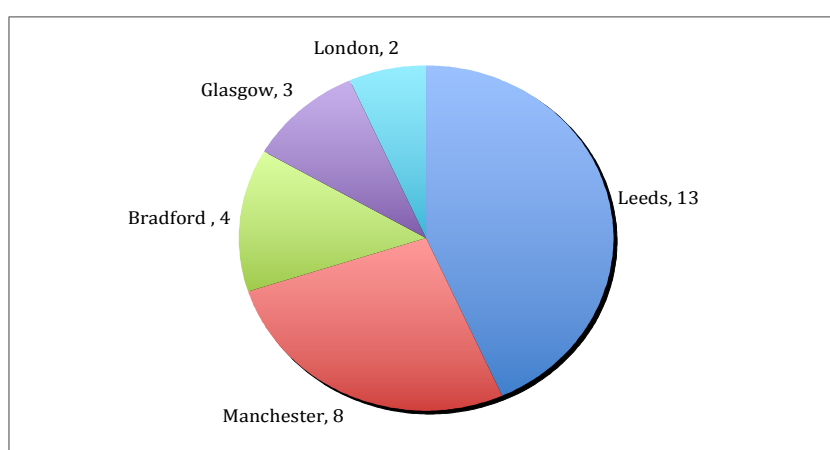


Chart 2: Locality of Respondents.

As the pie chart above indicates, from my sample, 13 were from the Leeds area, 8 respondents were from the Manchester area and 4 were from Bradford. 3 respondents grew up in Glasgow but settled in Leeds for study and work and 2 respondents moved from London to Leeds for study and research. Respondents were recruited mostly on university campuses rather than the localities they were from and this demonstrated the movement of young women in between areas such as Leeds, Manchester and Bradford for the purpose of higher education. As for respondents who were working, they were acquaintances /friends / relatives of women who were studying.

Occupation

Respondents in my sample can be classified in two groups. They were either studying fulltime or working fulltime when fieldwork was conducted. However, at the time of interview, only one respondent was looking for employment whilst doing voluntary placements. Respondents who finished their university degrees were either enrolled on a postgraduate course or working within their chosen professional fields. The chart below shows respondents' occupation when the research was conducted:

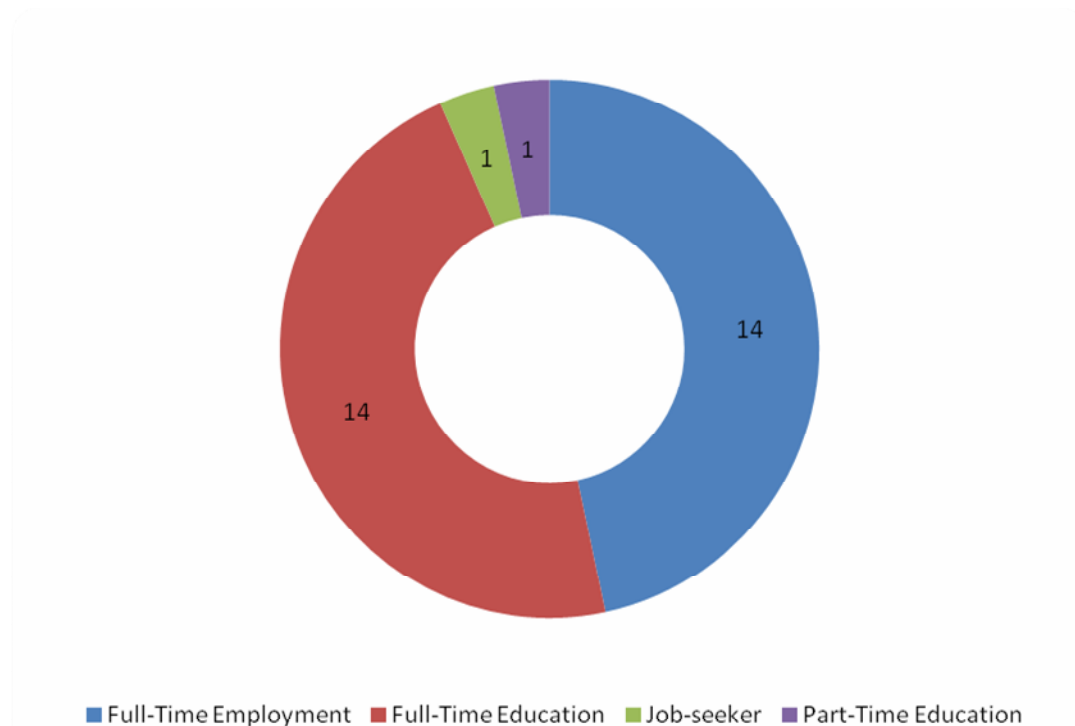


Chart 3: Occupation of Respondents.

In my research sample, 14 respondents were studying fulltime and 1 respondent studied part-time (Masters Degree) whilst working full-time. 14 respondents were in paid employment; 1 participant was looking for a job but was involved in voluntary work at the time of interview

University attended

In this sample, women have mostly studied at the University of Leeds (13) and the University of Bradford (7), where foundation 'access courses' are offered at the University of Bradford for people who want to enrol into science degrees at the University of Leeds at a later stage. Others have studied at University of Manchester (1), Manchester Metropolitan University (2), Leeds Metropolitan University (1), University of St Andrews (1), University of Aberdeen (1), London School of Economics (1), Dundee University (1), University of

Glasgow (1), and University of York (1). Among the respondents studying, 3 were post-graduate students. Most students in this research were enrolled in science related courses. The tendency for South Asian students to enrol in science degrees such as medicine (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007) appears to be well-founded as my sample reflects the popularity of science based degrees.

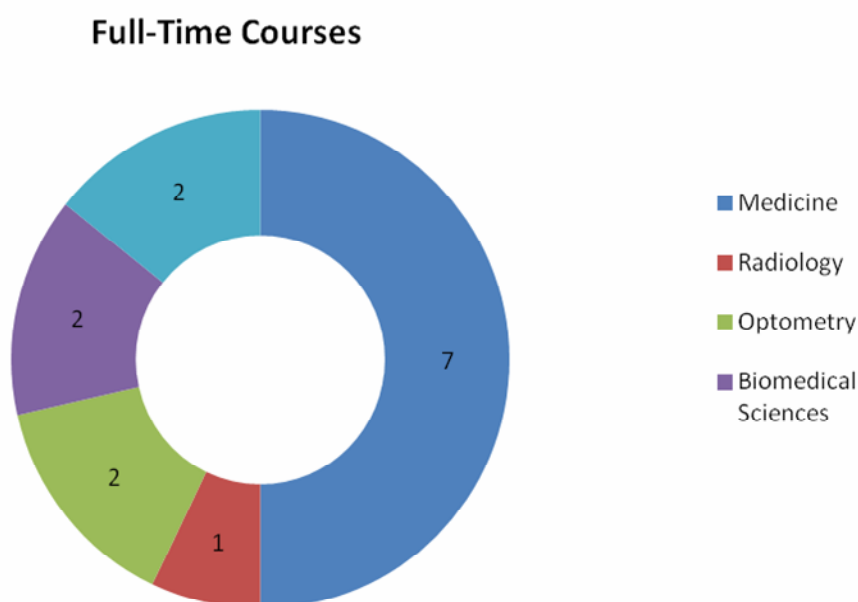


Chart 4: Respondents in Full-Time Courses.

The doughnut chart above shows what university courses respondents were enrolled in. More specifically, this research sample comprised 7 medical students, 1 Radiology student, 2 Optometry students, 2 Biomedical Science students and 2 Psychology students. 2 respondents were studying Counselling and Behavioural Therapy. Others studied Graphic Design, Law, Information Technology, Consumer Protection and Sociology.

The chart below illustrates respondents' employment fields:

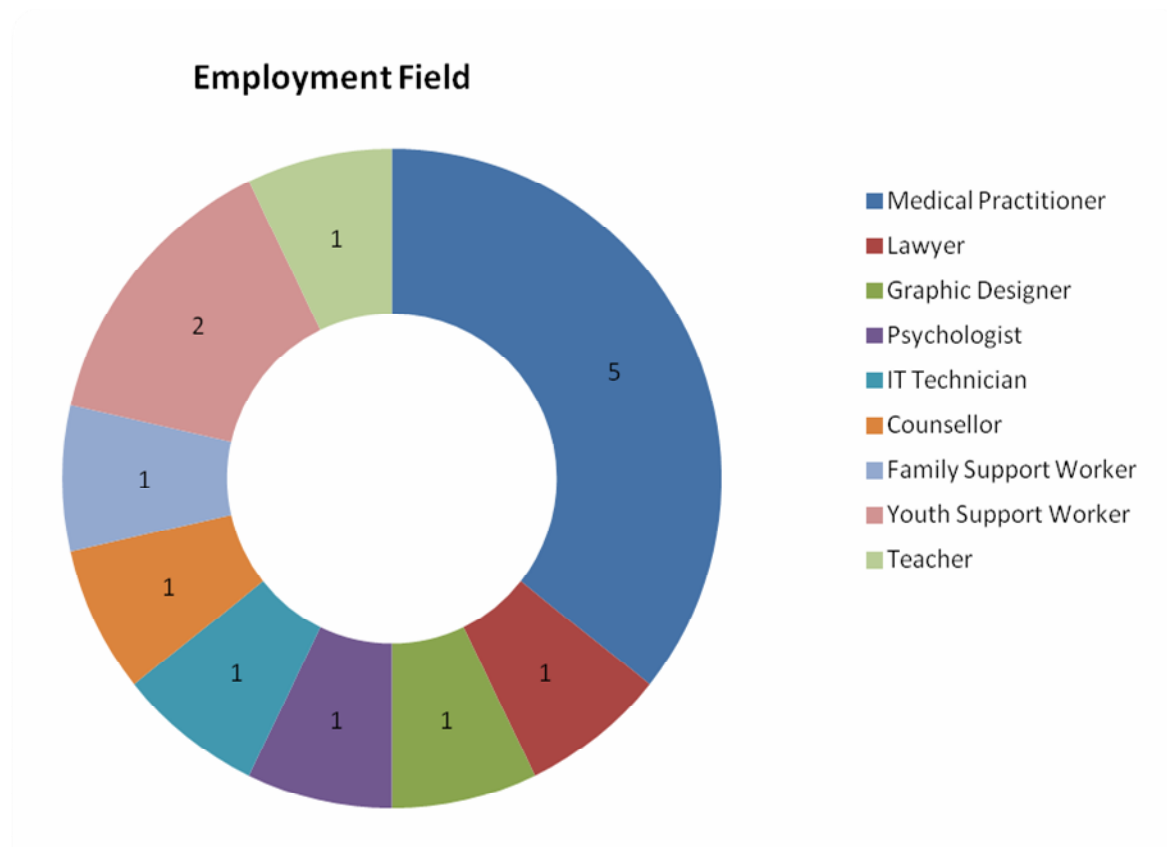


Chart 5: Fields of Employment of Respondents.

Those who were employed and were economically active at the time of interviewing worked as medical practitioners (5), lawyers (1), teachers (1), graphic designers (1), psychologists (1), IT technicians (1), Counsellors (1), Family Support Workers (1), and Youth Support Workers (2).

3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the major methodological feminist approaches (feminist standpoint theory and the feminist politics of difference) which I find useful and which also underline my research. Indeed, in the context of my study, British South Asian Muslim women's lives remain embedded in diverse social, cultural, religious and political experiences. Such experiences could be informed by 'difference' or 'sameness'; acknowledging axes of intersection between these boundaries enables the researcher to have better insight of the relationship that exists between interviewers and interviewees. In terms of the power relationship between the researcher and the researched, I have argued that the researcher needs to remain aware of her/his positionality during the research process so as to ensure a stable power balance through the research process. I have also thought it important to elaborate on my research methodologies (participant observation and qualitative

interviews) so as to provide a clear outline of how I went about accumulating relevant information for this thesis.

Nonetheless, I am also aware of the limitations of my methodology. In terms of my research sample, it is representative of a particular group of educated South Asian Muslim women in Britain. For instance, even though I have tried to keep the recruiting process as open as possible, due to snowballing, I have met most students through student societies such as Islamic societies on university campuses. The majority of women from these societies manifest their Islamic identities publicly and politically by being involved in the management of these societies, and the organisation of Islamic events for their members. It would be interesting if more attention was paid to the dynamics involved as young women negotiate strategies and identities as they navigate faith based societies such as the ISOCs; however, due to lack of space, I did not venture into further investigation. Also, my study is based in Northern England and hence, presents a limited geographical sample; as mentioned previously, my initial plan was to attempt a recruitment process in London so as to benefit from a wider range of interviewees' backgrounds but this proved impractical in terms of logistics and planning. Furthermore, as far as married respondents are concerned, at the time of my fieldwork, I did not encounter women who had studied and got married, but chose not to go into paid employment. Due to my recruitment methods, I met respondents who were either studying or working at the time of interviewing. Hence, my research sample remains limited in the sense that I have not interviewed this group of Muslim women who are graduates but who are not working.

The data I have gathered for my study now constitutes the following three empirical chapters of my thesis. Chapter Four looks at how young British South Asian Muslim women are exploring boundaries in negotiating gendered identities as they evolve within settings such as higher education and paid employment. Chapter Five highlights how these women are contesting and constructing Islamic identities in Britain, thereby generating notions of Muslimness. Chapter Six focuses on Muslim women's navigations of marriage as they negotiate Islamic and European concepts of marriage in Britain.

¹ Approaches to taking a feminist standpoint vary because there is more than one feminist theory and more than one feminist epistemological position (Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1997).

² See Susan Moller Okin's (1998) 'Is multiculturalism bad for women?'

³ As Peach (2006: 650), on Muslims and their geographical distribution in the UK maintains, 'moving northwards, the Muslim population tends to be more exclusively South Asian and Pakistani'. In effect, the concentration of South Asian Muslims in northern England lies within the West Yorkshire (Leeds-Bradford area) and Greater Manchester.

⁴ In fact, the BBC News Channel (Live Online) provides an 'immigration map' of Britain and locates the distribution of African Asian migration in the East Midlands, more specifically, in Leicester.

⁵ I am a believing Muslim but I do not fully practise the rites and rituals prescribed by Islam. I believe in Islam as spiritual force (faith/personal/private) rather than religion (cultural/political/global).

⁶ Robina Mohammad identifies herself as a British, non-practising Muslim of Pakistani ethnic origin.

CHAPTER FOUR

Exploring Boundaries: British South Asian Muslim Women in Higher Education and Employment

4.1 INTRODUCTION

British South Asian Muslim women are entering into higher education at an increasing rate (Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). Whilst young women actively pursue higher educational interests, as well as professional work options, the roles and expectations that Muslim women have in their communities are changing. As young women's visibility increases on university campuses and consequently in the workforce, women's evolving gender identities are becoming more apparent. In this chapter, I argue that higher education and paid employment are opening up new spaces for Muslim women in Britain for them to develop new gender identities through diverse experiences gained in public (education) as opposed to private (home) social contexts; in the process, women are pushing gendered boundaries and re-working gendered identities. The focus on higher education, and consequently paid employment, remains important as it shows how spaces such as educational and work settings lead women to develop new gender identities. Consequently, through independence gained from educational and employment paths, young women generate new expectations of marriage.

Ahmad's (2001: 137-152) study on British Muslim women and higher education in London, although published a decade ago, remains relevant to my work as similar issues about Muslim women's educational careers are raised. Women's motivations to study, the impacts of higher education on women's cultural, religious and 'personal identities', and how these evolve within their social contexts are issues that Ahmad (2001) discusses, finding that women have an agency to negotiate expected gender norms to form new ones, thereby developing 'modern traditions'. Other relevant studies remain helpful in framing my research look at the statistical rates of South Asian women's intake into higher education and their disadvantaged positions in the labour market, mainly through the lens of gender, class and ethnicity (Evans & Bowlby, 2000; Berthoud, 2000; Dale et al., 2002/2006; EOC, 2007; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). For these authors, class backgrounds, university acceptance rates and subject choices remain prominent factors that affect South Asian Muslim women's educational careers and employment options. Previous literature also demonstrates the considerable emphasis placed by mothers and fathers on women's education as being a valuable asset for a better lifestyle in the future; women would acquire status and prestige in their community, as well as financial security (Bhopal, 2009). For

many, the area of contention is not therefore going to university and acquiring a degree for potential future benefits, but lies in the fact of whether women should be exposed to university culture and what university life entails.

For many parents, the questions remain: should women be allowed to leave home and experience university life for the purpose of studying and should they do it at home or away? This reflects considerable issues relating to women's gendered identities within British South Asian Muslim communities. The danger in girls leaving home to go to university lies in the range of experiences they will inevitably be exposed to on campus; hence university life, which involves meeting people from a range of cultures and nationalities. The tendency to 'shelter' daughters from the greater freedom one acquires at university starts from a young age. This has been discussed by a number of researchers in the late 1990s. Expected gendered norms of behaviour, sexual purity and adherence to cultural and religious customs of teenage daughters are closely monitored by their families and local communities, whereby the community constructs acceptable gendered modes of behaviour for young Muslim women. Such policing is thought to be necessary by families and communities so that daughters are able to benefit from marriage proposals when it is time for them to settle down (Basit, 1997, Haw 1998, Dwyer, 1999, Shain, 2003, Mohammad, 2005). Indeed, if women are known to have had previous relationships, their marriage options may be affected as potential husbands' families could feel wary of being associated with them. In fact, university presents a space where women can engage in activities that their parents would not necessarily approve and condone. There is also the risk that after completion of their studies, women seize opportunities to move out of the community for good, due to employment prospects. These options raise a number of questions around the positions of Muslim women in their community. After finishing their degrees, would women go back to the family home and work in their locality, or would alternative living arrangements be considered? Would women be willing to consider marriage options as soon as they complete their studies?

This chapter aims to address the strategies employed by British South Asian Muslim women to enter the domains of education and employment. It reveals how young women are exploring boundaries as they navigate educational and employment settings and in so doing, push gendered boundaries to produce new gender identities. Their early negotiations of education and work prefigure later negotiations of marriage; as they acquire independence and freedom, their expectations of marriage are re-worked, ultimately leading them to articulate new gender identities. The findings in this chapter demonstrate that even though my research sample includes a range of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, hence of diverse experiences, they have all had to negotiate parental

expectations about higher education and employment. If for some women negotiations are about going to university at all, for others, they pertain to questions of whether to live away from home during university years. This chapter therefore provides a framework for understanding and emphasising the ways in which gender attitudes about education, employment and marriage are changing, and how these changes are impacting on young women's lives.

The chapter comprises four levels of analysis. Firstly, I examine the routes taken by participants to go to university. I investigate whether there are gender inequalities in how families respond to Muslim women's and men's wishes to pursue educational goals. This reflects women's access to education within their communities, hence highlighting whether Muslim women are in effect benefiting from opportunities that help break traditional gendered concepts of Muslim womanhood in British South Asian Muslim communities. Furthermore, I look at parents' and siblings' support and involvement as participants' planned to go into higher education. This indicates the levels of encouragement experienced by participants as far as family and community members are concerned. Secondly, I focus on the reasons motivating respondents to study and work. I look at questions around why Muslim women are entering into higher education, and how their parents and communities adapt to their choices of achieving educational and employment goals. An insight into the motivational factors leading them to participate into higher education and employment reveals how their navigations of study and work impact on other life options such as marriage. Thirdly, I consider how participants decided on whether to move away or stay home, hence their choice of university. This highlights the degrees of independence they have or acquire as they negotiate university options with their families. This is important as it helps us understand the multiple social contexts in which young women find themselves; the cultural and religious spheres of simultaneously being South Asian Muslim, as well as British, and wanting the education, emancipation, independence and liberation that other women aspire to. Fourthly, I reflect on how participants are pushing gendered boundaries as they navigate higher educational and paid employment settings. In particular, I assess how respondents negotiate educational aims as opposed to marriage plans; I discuss how educational aspirations influence marriage prospects and marriage time-frames for British South Asian Muslim women. This reveals how participants are using educational goals and career motivations so as to challenge parental or community expectations; consequently, these contestations enable participants to develop alternative gender identities.

4.2 ROUTES TO UNIVERSITY

4.2.1 Gender differences in higher education: Muslim women's unequal footing

I start this section by analysing whether Muslim women and men are given equal opportunities/chances to go into higher education in British South Asian Muslim communities. Determining whether women are given similar opportunities as men in terms of educational options helps us understand if firstly, young women's education is perceived as valuable in their communities and secondly, whether families and communities are ready to allow young women to embrace new gender identities as educated and eventually, professional Muslim women. All participants responded negatively, thinking that it is harder for women to go to university, with the exception of one respondent. As Rashida suggests:

'They are given equal chances but girls are more hard-working than boys and are definitely into higher education so as to improve their chances to work...more and more girls are studying...for now, our generation most girls are being educated, more than guys definitely' (Rashida).

Indeed, participants give different reasons as to why girls are treated differently when it comes to education. The older generation still promotes strict gender role attributions, promoting 'culturalist' notions of womanhood, where the community acts as a space allowing such attitudes to prosper. Nevertheless, as Nuzranah maintains, if girls are socialised in such a way that marriage is seen as their sole option, then it is inevitable that such mindsets remain unchallenged by the younger generation:

'I'd blame the older generation who are stuck to their views and refusing to budge from their ways...it works both ways, maybe we should change the view of the girls as well because they're like 'oh I'm getting married by the time I'm 20 or 21 so why bother?' Cause if parents are saying to you 'you are going to get married when you are 21 and have a family when you're about 25 or 26', a girl who is 16 years old, why would they think of going to university? If you're gonna have to quit and gonna have to be a housewife, what's the point?' (Nuzranah)

'Muslim men tend to go more to university than Muslim women maybe because women want to settle down earlier and I know women who have settled down and then gone to university later and that can happen, that's ok but definitely I think men go more than women, most likely family commitments might be the reason, so the men maybe go for the degree and earn for the family and women stay at home or find a part time job' (Aisha).

As Aisha maintains, women may be given the choice but men tend to consider university more than women as the latter have to think about marriage and family commitments as well as educational endeavours. However, participants in my study do not reflect this attitude; marriage is definitely to be considered once they settle in a career and they all hope to be successful in their career choices, as well as get married and raise a

family in the future. Parents are not inherently against women having an education per se but remain concerned about the ‘freedom’ or ‘independence’ they may acquire when exposed within a space where parental supervision is limited. Nonetheless, social class and locality account for differences in the ways people think about women and education. Equal chances for women to gain further education vary across communities and families:

‘Not wanting girls to go to university...like is it culture? Is it traditional? Is it religion? Sometimes they use religion as an excuse but it’s tradition or culture and they play the religion card saying oh Islam says this but it doesn’t...I don’t know any religion that doesn’t promote equality’ (Sonia).

According to participants like Sonia, gender inequality between women and men within higher education is because of ‘culture’ and not ‘religion’ as the community conflates the two, hence impacting on women’s educational chances. For respondents, there is no contradiction in following educational norms or work options, and be devout Muslims simultaneously:

‘As a Muslim I do agree that that’s what our roles are if we are...responsibility is not the right word for it....that is what God is asking you to do. But in the same way, I also don’t agree that if you do want to study and work as well, it’s wrong. Obviously I go out to work and earn money for the family, for the household. Although that is my husband’s responsibility, but I do also share his responsibility. He should also share mine in that whenever we do have a family, then he needs to also spend time and do the kinds of things that traditionally would have been left just for the mothers to do’ (Sabina).

Sabina, following Islamic principles, acknowledges the existing gender differences in Islam but also suggests that these should instead be evaluated as complementary instead of the clear-cut binary opposition of marriage and women, versus men and work. Interestingly, she justifies the need for women to educate themselves as there should be scope for interchangeable gender roles in marriage; it is a Muslim man’s duty to provide for his wife but Sabina maintains that sharing responsibilities must be recognised as a viable alternative where both genders have the options to negotiate identities on an equal footing.

It is also clear that community influence over South Asian Muslim families should not be ignored when it comes to gender differences experienced by Muslim women in their communities. Sonia highlights the fact that even educated parents maintain this gender bias as they do not question the cultural factors informing their decisions, which are usually collective and in the spirit of community-living. In the process, ‘Asian women’s potential is damaged’ (Lubaina). Clearly, women express their frustration at the level of control which the community upholds on perceptions about gender rights:

‘Men have more rights, women have to fight for their rights and what they want, I had to fight to go to university, not even rebel but fight and if my mum didn’t side

with me, I don't think I would be here today but if my brothers wanted to go to university, there would not have been any problem' (Rahila).

Indeed, the community plays a huge role in parents' decisions as to whether to agree to daughters going to university. Nevertheless, women hope to radically change these views when they have their own children, opting for a fairer way to treat girls and boys:

'My friend's nephew had a party and invited his boyfriends and that's fine but the girl cannot invite her friends over and the parents are educated, one of them is doing a PhD and the mother is a teacher and you'd think ok, we'll give them equal rights but no they don't because of the traditional culture it's so embedded in them, deep inside them... when I have kids, no matter what my husband says my kids are going to be treated the same, if my son has a night out well my daughter too cause there needs to be a fine balance' (Sonia).

Even though respondents maintain that there are gender differences in the value attributed to the education of women and men within their communities, respondents maintain that they will alter this discrepancy when they have their own children. Eventually, this will impact on Muslim women's gender identities as daughters' access to higher education becomes easier. In the following section, I focus on how parental support encourages respondents to get into higher education as young women explore educational avenues.

4.2.2 Parental support for daughters' educational goals

In this section, I highlight how parents' involvement in their daughters' educational careers have influenced positively on their educational outcomes. Indeed, despite parental concerns about women going into a higher educational setting, parental support in women's educational achievements remains a significant reason why women are entering into higher education. This also indicates the intergenerational changes in educational access occurring between the first and second generations of British South Asian migrants. In my research, fathers and mothers had similar and at times, different motivations in supporting their daughters to study at tertiary level. Both fathers and mothers viewed financial stability as a highly favourable outcome of higher education. For instance, Yasmin talks about the joint and complementary roles that mothers and fathers have played in them going to university:

'In different ways, my parents were both there for moral support, complementary... my dad's very good if I'm having stress attacks, like calm down and my mum will tell me to calm down but because she's been through the process herself, she knows how to organise stuff and check my essays for me whereas my dad would drop me and so on so they both helped in different ways' (Yasmin).

According to respondents, fathers' primary wish was that their daughters achieved economic security in the future; higher education was mostly seen as an investment, especially for women of working-class backgrounds. Some women suggest that their fathers have been more supportive of their educational paths than their mothers. For instance, Saeema's father

was more supportive than her mother, who would much 'rather see us at home'. Her mother was 'worried' about them living away as opposed to her father who 'got more used to the idea of us going away and being independent':

'Both trusted us but I think the reason they let us was because there was always that trust there, they're always trusting us like when we say 'we're not doing that' they know that we're not...so I think they trusted us to go away and obviously we couldn't betray that trust cause at the back of our mind, we know that our parents have trusted us so we can't let them down in a sense' (Saeema).

Some fathers are resisting the pressure that the community may exert on individual choices, especially when it comes to daughters' wishes to pursue education instead of marriage. As Faiza states:

'They all had different values and different priorities and whilst they value marriage and children and having children more than they value education...they're quite tight-knit but also insular kind of community and everything stays within and they don't want their children going out and especially the girls, the boys are fine but the boys they are not really bothered' (Faiza).

Faiza's father did not succumb to the extended family's tendencies to prioritise marriage over education for women. Indeed, in some families, marriage is still viewed as the primary role of women. As my research shows, some fathers are breaking these barriers and are embracing other avenues, more so than mothers. Even though it was Abida's choice to aim for higher studies, her father encouraged her:

'My father was much more supportive than my mum...I think mothers when it comes to daughters are a bit too protective...like 'oh they're going to go astray, they're going to disappear, we don't know what they're doing' (Abida).

Indeed, mothers tend to feel responsible for their daughters' behaviour and if they are away from home, it is difficult for them to maintain control over their daughters. However, most mothers remain supportive of their daughters' educational endeavours, albeit the concern of a few who believe that girls 'living away' could potentially be problematic. This said, fathers are still encouraging their daughters to go into higher education.

Respondents also draw on the importance of having role models as inspiration for them to be successful in education as well as in employment. They cite older siblings, aunts and mothers as having influenced their choices. Similarly, Ahmad's (2001) and Bagguley and Hussain's study (2007) demonstrate the principle that women are aided and encouraged by their sisters, cousins and other family members to pursue their educational goals. In this research, women who had elder siblings at university found it easier to go into higher education as negotiating with parents was easier. Alia recalls how difficult it was for her

sister to go to university. Siblings therefore act as pioneers to set the trend and do act as role models for younger siblings:

'There were reservations not necessarily from the immediate family but from the extended family...about girls going to university and you know, sort of them going astray...but my sister stood her ground and said she was going to go university and at the end of the day, my parents accepted that...when I came along and it was time for me to go to university, it was just a natural route...there wasn't any of this barrier' (Alia).

An elder sister who has been to university is hence a positive influence on younger siblings' chances and opportunities to study. As Nazia says:

'My older sister graduated in law...and she made it easier because she moved out but she had to fight for everything... once my younger sister moves out, it's a matter of time, you look up to the eldest so, hopefully they see us as successful and I'll be there to support them if they say 'mum and dad won't let me do this'... you think you can't stand on your own feet but you can, you will struggle but you will do it, even though you'll have the financial burden but then you do it for your independence' (Nazia).

In my research, however, nine participants were the first to be going into higher education in their immediate and extended families. They view themselves as 'pioneers' who will set the example for the coming generation, 'where girls won't have to fight to go to university'. In their family, Nazia and her elder sister were the first women going 'against tradition of women staying at home':

'We were the first girls ever to take education beyond 16 in our family'. No other women or cousins in the family have thought of going to university but our parents wanted us to get an education at some point but it was a bit difficult as we were the first ones' (Nazia).

Daughters are also making informed decisions about their life options. Indeed, some women may choose to deliberately refrain from pursuing educational goals in order to settle down. As Alia suggests, a few women in her family have been to university, but the majority of her female cousins have stopped at college:

'My female cousins just went to college and then started work straightaway...haven't really gone down academic routes...but that's not because there's been barriers to go to university but because they chose not to pursue academic routes themselves...so more their choice' (Alia).

Furthermore, Sanaa makes an interesting comparison between her female cousins in Britain and those in Pakistan, where women in her community reach up to college and do not aim for further education:

'My female cousins in Pakistan have got degrees, they've studied as they've got money one's a teacher and she's got a great job but my British cousins, females are and women in the community, they all go to college, the majority I mean so till they're 18 and then after, they probably go straight to work or they get married...can also go to work and get married' (Sanaa).

In Sanaa's family, going for a university degree is not a natural progression from school or college for women, whereas in Pakistan, women have progressed on the educational level by more and more women opting for higher education. However, in Britain, marriage after school is still viewed as the preferred option for girls.

I also asked participants why their mothers encourage them to go into higher education. A common reason is that mothers were never given the options themselves to chose between studies and marriage. The main expectation that their own mothers (respondents' grandmothers) had of them was for them to get married and have children. This is reflective of Afshar's research (1989, 1994) which showed that women delay independent and individual goals in order to care for their home and children. Looking after the home, their husbands and their children was the norm. In my research, only two mothers out of thirty were educated up to university level. One of them trained as a medical practitioner but stopped working when she had children, while the other is currently working as a researcher at The University of Leeds. Most mothers went to school up to 16 years old and are either homemakers or working part-time.

Most mothers married in their early twenties, a time when their daughters are actually enrolled into courses at university. They hence support and in some cases, fight, for their daughters to have the choice to study. In the process, mothers are redefining gender roles for their daughters, hence giving them the space to develop new gender identities. As Zainab points out, her mother 'did everything after marriage, some courses, driving'. Participants suggest that their mothers have been active in providing them with the emotional and in some cases, even financial support. Mothers' educational backgrounds also make a difference in terms of them thinking about the importance of higher education and the opportunities it creates in the future. Although some women maintain that their mother and father have been equally influential and supportive of their going to university, there are cases where mothers have been the distinctive role models and agents encouraging their daughters to study. Mothers intervene in cases where fathers maintain that marriage is a better option for women. As Rahila points out, her mother insisted that she was not ready for marriage but instead, encouraged her to enroll for a medical degree, even if that meant living away from home. This did not seem to be problematic for her mother, as compared to her father, who wished her to be closer to the family after having completed her secondary schooling:

'She encouraged me a lot whereas my dad not really, he chose the easy option and he said get a job here close to home, he wasn't disheartened but he was more disheartened that I was going to leave home and live by myself at a young age, but my mum pushed me to do medicine. If my mum hadn't put her foot down, he would have got me married at the age of 18, my mum said 'No, she's going to university and she wants to be a doctor, it's not the time for her to get married'...then my dad backed down and now they're glad I did it' (Rahila).

For Rahila's father, the concern was not about education per se, but more about the consequences of going into higher education, such as living away on her own. For some mothers, however, the priority is for daughters to embrace the educational opportunities they were never given, rather than accepting potential marriage proposals.

Nevertheless, in spite of being supportive, mothers also present their daughters with contrasting options, which they are expected to choose from. Marriage, though delayed due to educational purposes, is always viewed as a viable alternative for young women who do not wish to go for further studies. For example, Yasmin was expected to make a decision between higher education and marriage:

'Initially the reason I thought of going to university was because my mum said 'if you don't want to go to university, you might as well just get married' cause what else are you gonna do? Sit at home and be bored and waste time and I thought I definitely don't want to get married (Laugh) so I went through all the courses that they could possibly have' (Yasmin).

Interestingly, Yasmin makes a link between higher education and marriage. In her family, there are two groups of women, those who marry and those who study; stark choices are made between the two, whereby women in her family do not seem to do both. Often, education is not seen as a priority for girls, whilst marriage is:

'It seems to be the one that do pursue education that don't get married and the ones that don't go for education are the ones who have kids so like they don't do both but for me I'm hoping I don't end up in either like I'd like to have both really and that's yeah, I do hope so' (Yasmin).

Indeed, Yasmin does not want to be tied up to either career, or marriage. She would like to be able to bring the two together without having to choose:

'There's pockets like the girls who have pursued education have done really well...I think in our own house, there's me, my mum and my sister we've all pursued education to a high level, in the rest of the family there's kind of a divide, people who have not bothered at all because they've had other priorities in life or people have done a degree and not done anything with it and had children afterwards and my female cousin has been to uni, she's done a degree and a Masters and she's looking to be doing a PhD next and then on my dad's side one of them did a degree and the rest didn't, they just got married' (Yasmin).

Such active negotiations between educational and marital choices demonstrate that

young women are developing new gendered identities as they redefine Muslim women's roles and aspirations in British South Asian communities. In this section, I have underlined how women are re-defining their aspirations through their educational routes; as demonstrated, participants' experiences of the types of schools attended, their contestations of community beliefs that girls must not go to university, and their navigations of their parents' concerns and trust so as to gain approval/permission to go into higher education are all reflective of how respondents are dealing with the challenges they face as they consider educational options. In the following section, I look at the motivations informing participants' choices to go into higher education as this throws light on the value respondents attribute to their educational careers, and as such, their determination to re-work gender identities within their communities.

4.3 CHOOSING TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

Respondents place tremendous importance upon higher education and have chosen higher education as an option due to the future benefits that come out of it. Previous research conducted by Ahmad *et al.*, (2003) and Connor *et al.*, (2004) on ethnic minority and their rates into higher education in the UK suggest that young South Asian women enter into higher education for improved employment prospects, and consequently, for acquiring better financial gains. Indeed, the reasons for different ethnic minority groups to consider higher education as an option rests on family support as well as improved employment prospects (Connor *et al.*, 2004). Another significant issue raised in previous studies about South Asian women and education relates to social class. In effect, Modood *et al.*, (1997) claim that educational experiences are different for South Asian groups who are from different social classes. In fact, in my sample, social class or locality appears to be inconsequential when it came to the importance and emphasis placed on daughters' education. Indeed, the intrinsic value of education and the prestige it entails is recognised by women from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds. Nevertheless, I stress that from my research, the noticeable difference between women from middle-class and working-class backgrounds is that moving away to study remained an issue for working-class parents whilst middle-class parents were readier to allow daughters to live away from home. Women from working-class backgrounds were therefore encouraged to study, but some degree of negotiation occurred when it came to decide where to study, as compared to respondents from middle-class backgrounds, who demonstrated more agency in choosing their tertiary institution. Indeed, unlike Reay *et al.*, (2005), who suggest that middle-class parents tend to play a bigger part when it comes to choice of university, my research demonstrates that women from middle-class backgrounds were predominantly involved in

their choice of institution as compared to women from working class backgrounds, whose parents were more active in their daughters' choice of university.

As Ahmad's (2001: 144) study has shown, acquiring an education is 'not simply a middle-class strategy', where it is expected that women graduates are inherently from middle-class homes. In such environments, it is more likely that parents are graduates themselves, and hence, are academically and professionally prominent. However, in my study, women of working-class backgrounds are being encouraged by their parents to enter into higher education, thereby deconstructing the notion that higher education remains a middle-class venture. In my research, the majority of respondents view education as being 'very important'. They give different reasons as to why they think that having a degree is worth it; higher education brings changes in women's identities, lifestyles, future work options and marriage plans. The primary interest for most women I interviewed to get into higher education is to be able to work and be economically independent so as not to have to rely on men in the family, like for instance, their fathers, brothers or husbands for a livelihood.

More recent research by Dwyer and Shah (2009), similarly, found that young Muslim women link the gain of higher educational qualifications to better employment prospects, where women aspire to more professional rather than vocational jobs. Participants in my research express additional reasons why they are going to university. Firstly, their motives revolve around the support network (family, friends) they have to study. Secondly, the desire to become financially independent remains a significant issue for participants. Thirdly, respondents mention the benefits gained from university life as opposed to immediately considering marriage after compulsory schooling. Fourthly, it is important for participants to fulfil the Islamic notion of gaining knowledge as Muslims. Finally, being educated provides them with the opportunity to become 'educated mothers' which in turn, helps the future generation to embrace the benefits of higher education. These outcomes of higher education will in fact provide new spaces for Muslim women to redefine their future life options, such as, for instance, marriage. As such, this opens up possibilities for women to assert new gender identities. In the next section, I look more closely at why respondents have considered higher education as an option after secondary schooling and hence, provide an insight into the explorations of their educational paths.

4.3.1 'Defining who you are'

For half of my respondents, going to university was considered a 'natural' and an 'obvious' progression from secondary schooling. Not going to university appears to be an

almost unthinkable move for most participants. There were expectations from themselves and their families that they would progress in their educational endeavours after post-compulsory schooling. Bagguley and Hussain (2007: 17) found that women of Indian origin tended to have a more 'natural progression' to considering university after school, as opposed to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Comparatively, the women I interviewed are predominantly of Pakistani origin and my sample demonstrates that they were expected to go to university, regardless of ethnic background. Alia (Indian origin) 'never ever imagined not going to university':

'I've always been very academic. And because I've always scored high...I'd always get the encouragement... both from home and family...so as far as I can remember I never ever imagined not going to university you know (Alia).

In being always 'highly academic', Alia was encouraged by her parents to study. Alia mentions the role that teachers also played in encouraging her to study. Previous research by Haw (1998) and Basit (1997) have looked at the roles that teachers and the school environment/careers guidance have played in young South Asian women's access to information about further education. Their findings reveal the stereotypical cultural and religious assumptions that adolescent girls faced at school. Teachers and staff hold views such as educational prospects of Muslim girls being hindered due to them agreeing to arranged marriages in their late teens. Consequently, South Asian girls do not benefit from adequate support or encouragement from teachers and advisers. However, with more women entering into higher education, such stereotypical notions of the 'Asian girl undergoing an arranged marriage instead of studying' might be expected to change; South Asian girls will then be at par with girls from other ethnic backgrounds.

In entering into higher education, participants argue that they will be able to develop their potential and achieve what they want out of life. Farha thinks that education 'changes everything' and 'defines who you are'. For Nuzranah, education helps to equalise status within marital relationships:

'In our culture, if you're the same standard as your partner, you get the same respect. So I don't want to be a burden for anybody later on in life so it is important in that way...being on the same level as your partner in our culture means you have the same respect' (Nuzranah).

Indeed, gendered power relations between husband and wife are reassessed due to women's educational achievements. For Sabina, education provides a space where she develops scope for lifestyle improvements and personal achievements:

'I want to do better at everything and I want to progress myself and move on to the next place. And that's the difference. I know a lot of people would say 'Yeah, yeah

I've got a comfortable 9 to 5, I can sit and do this job for the next 20 years and that would be fine by me', but it's not...without education, no way you can do that' (Sabina).

Linking education and work, she talks about the possibilities of continually improving one's future employment prospects. Moreover, Sabina says that education has given her a set of 'morals and principles, a desire to progress yourself'. Since finishing university, she has been looking for her fourth job and says that this progression is made easy because of her education. Abida suggests that 'education is the starting point to independence and a career, experience and stability come with work'. Higher education provides women with avenues that allow them to be more liberal with their work options in the future; they have the agency to strategically think about career moves and career fields as they gain practical experience at work, backed by technical knowledge gained at university:

'If I had not gone to university, I won't be doing what I'm doing now...I wouldn't have gone to uni, I would have still been that sheltered little girl living with my mum and dad and not knowing any better and the crowd I was hanging around during my teenage years, I'm glad I moved away... cause I see them now and I see myself and I think...I know it sounds snobbish but I don't care, I did what I had to do' (Saeema).

For Saeema, education has helped her redefine her life options. She compares her experiences with her friends who have not been to university and is pleased that she persevered through her years of studying. With education, the world is viewed differently. As Sanaa states:

'I'm different to people back in Oldham, my family who haven't been to uni, I feel that they're so close-minded and their life is the same, closed but I'm different, I want to do new things and travel and by studying and going to uni, I feel the world is a bigger world for me than it is for somebody who hasn't gone out' (Sanaa).

In suggesting that 'education makes a person', Haleema claims that there is a noticeable difference between people who have studied and those who have not been to university:

'Education makes a person because I've seen people who are not educated and compared to people who are educated, there's such a difference in personality, I mean talking to an educated person, you can talk about anything, they can give you their opinion and education to me, it's a whole way of life, it's not only having a degree but it moulds the person through the interactions. For me not having an education would mean not having a life really so it's really important to me. I cannot imagine myself without it, can't imagine myself as a housewife, sitting at home and just raising kids and not doing much, I'm not saying they don't do much but getting out into the world, I've always wanted to study' (Haleema).

The extra-curricular activities that one engages in whilst at university also help in molding one's character. Education is not only about having a degree but also about networking and meeting people in the process, hence broadening one's horizons. University campuses thus offer women a space where they not only reach educational goals but also

develop their personalities and gender identities. Haleema is convinced that she would be unhappy ‘staying at home and not doing much’; according to her, ‘getting out into the world’ is what women should aim for. Indeed, women are contesting traditional gender roles of being essentially the homemaker. Alternative identities such as ‘educated woman’ and ‘working woman’ are embraced. Having just the role of raising a family is not fulfilling enough and when comparing herself to women who ‘just sit at home and raise kids’, Haleema does not condemn, but categorises women’s lifestyles into two groups: those who study and work, and those who stay home and raise children. The distinction here relies heavily on women’s attitudes towards higher education. Such distinctions made by respondents demonstrate that British South Asian Muslim women are using education and employment as reliable benchmarks to define new gender identities for women of their generation, further highlighting the dichotomy ‘homemaker’ versus ‘working woman’. In the following section, I elaborate on respondents’ emphasis on economic security as an important outcome of higher education, and the role this plays in helping Muslim women to assert new gender identities.

4.3.2 Economic security and financial independence

Respondents view higher education as a means of improving their employment prospects; likewise, Bagguley and Hussain’s (2007) study demonstrates that young women consider higher education as a stepping stone to career progression and improved employment options. As previous research by Dale *et al.*, (2002) indicates, the participation rates for South Asian Muslim women in employment are lowest where women have children. Indeed, all the students interviewed for this study were determined to go into paid work after graduation. Those who finished their studies were working full-time except for one respondent who was undergoing training. For women in my research, higher education was evidently a means to better their economic prospects and consequently, improve their standards of living, whether they decide to live on their own or have their own families in the future. Young women also remain aware of the economic advantage a couple acquires if both partners are in paid employment. The role that education plays in achieving and maintaining this aim is highlighted by respondents:

‘Even if you don’t want to have a massive career, you do need good education and if anything happens, you can earn money and especially in the UK, living here on one’s person salary is very difficult...such a small percentage here earn more than 40, 000 pounds a year, only 10 per cent!...I’m comfortable now but imagine if there was one other person’ (Bushra).

Bushra considers education to be a ‘necessity’ nowadays. She talks about the difficulty of raising a family on one income in the UK and thinks that lifestyle improves

with both the wife and husband earning. Some women persevere in acquiring education even in the advent of difficulties such as lack of parental support. The reasons given for such insistence in reaching educational goals reflect women's motivations and desires to become financially independent, and depend on themselves for a livelihood:

'It's top priority, it makes you a good person, gives you freedom, independence, you can stand on your own two feet to support yourself... being able to have your wage ...so for me it's given such a high priority because of the way I was brought up...if education was part of the normal thing, maybe I wouldn't have studied as hard but I was a complete bookworm...if it was normal then my parents would be supportive of me, I probably wouldn't have been as stressed, like having an exam, you can rely on your parents and they make you feel better but...everything is on me, there's a lot of pressure... I'm alone' (Nazia).

Nazia claims that education is her 'priority' as this will lead to her independence. She is struggling with her degree due to lack of parental understanding and support. She studies twice as hard because education for her is not a considered 'normal' as women in her family do not consider the educational route over marriage. In fact, the educational path for women in Nazia's family is not considered as being 'normal'. Nazia, in studying, challenges this notion and is determined to have a professional career after terminating her medical degree, thereby re-defining her gender identity as an 'educated' Muslim woman. In the next section, I focus on why respondents think that education may help women in their future roles as mothers; their reliance on education to alter the notion of motherhood within their communities is indicative of the role which education plays in altering Muslim women's gender identities.

4.3.3 An educated mother: setting the example for the next generation

Participants consider education to be important as it will help them become better mothers in the future. Their interests in promoting the benefits of education to the next generation suggest that respondents consider education to be a significant aspect contributing to the re-workings of gender identities within British South Asian Muslim communities. Indeed, respondents portray enthusiasm in ensuring that the need for education is understood and valued by the younger generation. As Bagguley and Hussain's (2007) research also notes, women wanted to become better parents and members of their community and in effect, used education as a platform to achieve their goals. This may be a way for young women to reconcile the competing discourses that hinder women to enter into education as they negotiate parental and community approval. As they increasingly consider higher education as an option, they are altering perceptions about women and education within their communities, thereby embracing the notion that eventually, they would be perceived as an 'educated' mother. For instance, Aisha maintains that education is

an asset that can be passed on to the next generation, where children can also develop ambitious plans to better their lifestyles. This reflects the inter-generational differences amongst respondents' grandmothers, mothers and themselves that arise when comparing women's access to education and work:

'It gives you a broader sense of what's going on in the world, extra qualifications and you're gaining something for yourself which you can pass on to the next generation as well so it's very important to excel in that rather than working in a dead-end job' (Aisha).

Likewise, Bushra and Yasmin draw on the importance of the role of mothers in their children's education; they situate mothers as being the primary educators of their children. For them, higher education provides women with better abilities to fulfil this role:

'It's important because education gives you a sense of awareness and if you've got it, then you've got a better chance of understanding what's going on in life...for your children as well, if you are educated then you will be able to instill in them...mothers who teach their kids from a young age, even traditionally in Asian families, it's the mother that does a lot of the stuff so if she's not educated, when the kids come home from school, you can't help them, you want to be an educated mother' (Bushra).

'I thought of going to university because my mum said 'if you don't want to go to university, you might as well just get married' cause what else are you gonna do? Sit at home and be bored and waste time and I thought I definitely don't want to get married (Laugh)...it's very important for women to be educated as one day we'll have our own children and not only to be able to help them in terms of their homework but just the life experiences that you get through university, it helps you in your marriage, it helps you in bringing your children up and there's that saying: if you educate a man you educate one person and if you educate a woman, you educate many more' (Yasmin).

Yasmin went into higher education because she had to choose between studying and marriage as soon as she completed secondary school. For her, university life experiences gained at university provide women with the necessary skills that contribute to not only fulfil their future roles as mothers but to also have a good marriage. Indeed, Yasmin's quote clearly illustrates that young women are using education spaces such as university to develop skills which would ultimately help them shape their understandings and experiences of marriage. Next, I focus on how respondents rate the importance of education as being Islamic, thereby relying on arguments informed by religion in order to justify their educational endeavours.

4.3.4 Education: an integral part of my Islamic faith

Respondents draw on their Islamic beliefs to justify the importance of education in their lives, arguing that gaining knowledge is part of the Islamic ethos; indeed, Lubaina suggests that it is both women's and men's responsibility to 'seek knowledge'. Backed by

this argument, Lubaina explains that this has helped her convince her parents to let her go into higher education and hence, claiming her religious right, as a practising Muslim, to acquire knowledge. For these women, Islam is not only being used as a medium for spiritual fulfillment but is also being utilised as an empowering tool to help them define their future life options:

'The first thing that was revealed to the Prophet was the word ikram, meaning 'read'...I had that against them, I could use that against my dad and he couldn't say anything against it. For both men and women...that was explicitly said' (Lubaina).

'The Prophet peace be upon him emphasised education so much, so much so that if you have to go to China to seek knowledge then go, learning is a process, cradle to the grave and so it's part of my faith and that's why it's really important' (Haleema).

Haleema also argues that knowledge must be actively sought after as Islam emphasises the value of education for Muslims; for her, it remains a duty which requires considerable attention. Fatimah looks at the importance of education in Islam by relating to the gender equality encouraged by her religion when it comes to Muslim women's rights and duty they owe to their family:

'Education allows me to have a professional job and earn for myself, total independence but actually not being independent but being non-dependent, instead of me depending on my father for my whole life, where he will retire soon and most families who have elder sons, they go out and earn and become the head of the family but because I'm the eldest, I feel it's my responsibility to go and do what a son would do, because Islam doesn't differentiate between female doing this and that, and male doing this and this, it's equal opportunity' (Fatimah).

Fatimah does not want to be financially dependent on her parents; as I argued previously (section 4.3.2), financial independence remains a priority for young women in my study. Deconstructing the cultural notions that Muslim women's roles should strictly be defined as homemakers, Fatimah is convinced of her religious approaches to women's roles. These indicate an egalitarian ethos encouraging equality in roles between women and men within Islam. For her, practising Islam and wearing the hijab are not barriers that prevent her from studying and thinking of pursuing a career. On the contrary, Fatima reflects on the fact that Islam gives her equal rights with men to fulfil her potential as well as uphold the financial duties that sons are expected to carry on as soon as they are in a position to help the family. Indeed, higher education provides women with the necessary tools and requirements to build up careers which will help them fulfil responsibilities that are in essence promoting gender equality between Muslim daughters and sons within Muslim households, thereby encouraging the progression of women's identities as financially independent working women. Indeed, such changes in respondents' perceptions may have a

bearing on the ways in which they understand their roles within marriage and consequently, lead them to generate new gender identities as they evaluate their options along more egalitarian notions surrounding gender roles within their communities. In the following section, I elaborate on participants' educational and employment endeavours within discourses of social class and mobility. This discussion demonstrates how differences in social milieu impacts on respondents' educational careers, as well as highlights their positionings within their social contexts. More importantly, their assessments of where and how they situate themselves on the social ladder portrays the ways in which higher education and employment are utilised as benchmarks informing their negotiations of social class. As such, their navigations demonstrate how respondents are actively constructing new gender identities as they aspire for social mobility.

4.3.5 Education, work and social mobility

Respondents who rate their social status as 'middle-class' do so with respect to their parents' occupation and income, their educational levels and their geographical locations (where they live). These women are from educational backgrounds where fathers are educated to university level and occasionally, mothers. Their parents are therefore professionals or successful businessmen, and hence, economically affluent. For women who maintain that they are from 'working-class backgrounds', parents are usually involved in manual jobs. However, they tend to suggest that although their parents are working-class, they would think of themselves as middle-class due to their education levels, employment and financial status. This shows that spaces such as higher education and work are having an impact on how women are negotiating and redefining their positions and gender identities within their local communities by climbing up the social ladder. Linked to the existing literature (Connor *et al.*, 2004) on ethnic minorities and social mobility acquired through education in the UK, my research also supports the notion that education and social class remain inextricably joint:

'I think it's difficult to define...I would say working class obviously. But if you're talking about finances, that's a middle...definitely fluid' (Sabina).

'I am middle-class but my family is working class and the difference is in the things that I have and the things I want, education is one thing but I also think your interests, your views and career' (Sanaa).

'My family...working class and me, I'd probably be middle class and it's because of profession, if you're a doctor then you're gonna have a better social background than someone who's a cleaner, I know that sounds bad but social backgrounds, like you're more eligible to do different things cause you have the means to do it' (Rubina).

These quotes illustrate how higher education provides opportunities for social mobility. Higher education, employment, and social class influence women's options and lifestyles and hence, their identities; for women from working-class backgrounds, education offers a platform where standards of living change for the better. In fact, respondents perceive social class, an aspect of their identity, as being contingent and contextual, and hence, fluid, thereby denoting a progression in how they perceive gender identities. More importantly, they highlight how social class, through education, is different for them and their parents; intergenerational changes can further be understood as young women express how they socially move from working-class backgrounds to a middle-class environment through university and employment. However, women do not rate money per se as a marker of social status but instead, view the lifestyle that people benefit through income gained due to higher education as being more important.

'I'm glad I've got the degree that I have, nursing diploma and then medical degree from St Andrews and it's important, but if I had a rich husband (Laugh), education wouldn't bother me but you do need education to have that status in the community and to move forward in life' (Rahila).

Rahila, of a working-class background, suggests that education would not 'bother' her if her husband could fully provide for her; education is somehow important for her because she has been able to 'move forward in life'. Since getting married, her priorities have changed and she would have preferred not to work but she cannot afford to stay home. Rahila is on a higher income than her husband and the financial running of the household depends heavily on her. For Rahila, education provides her with not only financial security, but status in her community. As her words describe, higher education is a means to an end, although she still views her educational achievements as 'important'.

Tasneem, who is from a middle-class background, thinks that higher education becomes a marker of social status, where one's success and achievements, and consequently social class, are understood due to one's willingness to go through the educational route:

'You need education to be able to have a respectful life and to not have to worry about money and be secure in life then education plays a big role whereas obviously if you don't need the financial support, you do ok and you have a business ahead of you, not to say it's not important because for you to run that business you still need to be educated but in your life it might not have such a big impact...at the end of the day, social class is about how you have achieved what you have, how intelligent you are' (Tasneem).

Participants maintain that due to a lack of education and exposure, people who are 'not educated' tend to stick to traditional values and as a result, do not move up the social ladder. For example, Haleema (middle-class) suggests that the attitudes that people hold from

working-class Muslim communities that women should not study perpetuate themselves into 'cycles', hence preventing them from improving educational levels and social class:

'I think people who are not as high like in terms of income or education, like the working-class, they tend to maintain tradition more because they are not as exposed to other environments and other cultures because for them it's work and home, this cycle whereas the upper-classes, education contributes to what class you are so people are more educated then they tend to be upper-class and they are more exposed to other cultures because they are more well traveled and meet wider range of people so they tend to have a more mixed cultural values rather than people who are working class who have blinkers and are more narrow-minded about things...like the views they have about women studying' (Haleema).

However, respondents from working-class backgrounds are contesting and questioning such 'traditions' that hinder Muslim women's participatory rates into higher education. They remain aware of how exposure at university and 'meeting a range of people of different cultures' are beneficial in terms of developing skills and awareness to be better equipped for the future. Clearly, women are maximising their chances to move up the social ladder through educational achievements, hence attributing much importance to improved social status, which is becoming a significant strategy for Muslim women to alter their gender identities.

As such, this section has highlighted how participants are engaging with the motivational factors pushing them to go to university or into paid employment; in so doing, they develop new gender identities as they navigate their options of educational and professional careers. Gaining a sense of achievement, financial security and upward social mobility, fulfilling the Islamic emphasis on acquiring knowledge, as well as ensuring that women are better equipped as 'educated mothers' for the next generation demonstrate how education has influenced respondents' prospects and future life options. My findings correlate with previous studies conducted by Ahmad (2001) and Bagguley and Hussain (2008), which also reveal that higher education generates positive outcomes such as economic security, as well as ensures that future generations benefit from the skills of 'educated' mothers. However, from my study, I also stress that respondents' educational achievements bring into question their positions on marriage, where education and employment influence their perceptions of marriage, and the roles within it, as they navigate educational and work spaces. Indeed, respondents have already expressed the changes that may occur in their roles as 'educated' mothers as more women gain education and encourage their children to follow educational routes in the future. Women are therefore altering notions of motherhood within their communities. What is important about my findings is that through educational and work settings, women are clearly finding new spaces to assert new gender identities which encompass notions around financial

independence, upward social mobility and a duty to fulfil an Islamic precept and motherhood. In the following section, I analyse how respondents' university experiences influence their gender identities; this enlightens us on how participants grapple with changes brought about by their educational experiences as they embark on their educational careers.

4.4 UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES

How participants perceive their experiences at university is an important area in my study as it reveals how Muslim women participate in university life so as to develop or embrace new gender identities within new spaces which are not essentially monitored by community norms. All describe their university experiences as 'enjoyable'. Indeed, apart from the fact that they will be gaining academic qualifications, university campuses are spaces where research participants assess and negotiate who they want to be, and who to befriend. Such interactions lead them to decide how they want to affirm their Muslim identities within the larger context of British society. Women talk about a range of experiences on campus, which demonstrates that experiences remain subjective and varied. They also describe their lifestyles and discuss their involvement in social groups within university settings, where their experiences are affected by whether they live on campus or at home. Some participants are extremely active and involved in social, cultural and religious groups, whilst others prefer to concentrate fully on the academic experiences, as opposed to the more social aspects of university life. Because of my sampling strategy, many respondents who were studying at the time of interviewing were members of the Islamic Societies (ISOC) at their respective universities, and all those who were working reflect on their involvement within the ISOC.

In this section, the key questions I raise relate to whether university experiences lead respondents to develop and assert new gender identities as they negotiate 'cultural' and 'religious' boundaries encountered at university. Firstly, I focus on the living arrangements of participants at university. Secondly, I concentrate on how women are exploring the boundaries of 'culture' and 'religion' through exposure at university. Thirdly, I review the extent to which campus activities and peer groups influence respondents' identities, with a particular focus on the role which Islamic societies play in respondents' experiences of university life. In effect, this reflects how Islamic identities are felt, managed and expressed on campus. Recently, work by Hopkins (2010) has focused on the construction and contestation of Muslim identities on university campuses in the UK. Indeed, Hopkins (2010) study suggests that university, as a space, encourages the ways in which Muslim students shape politics and power relations on campus. Hopkins' research (2010: 160) demonstrates that students perceive the campus as a 'tolerant and liberal place', where there is a 'shared

sense of identity'. Nevertheless, as Muslim students negotiate the campus, it is also possible that through student societies and groups, others experience 'peer pressure and bullying' in the sense that not all students need or want to conform to specific modes of behaviour, thereby denoting spaces of inclusion and exclusion. This section concentrates on my research participants' social experiences at university, and how these influence their gender identities.

4.4.1 Moving or not moving: women's options of university life

I start this section by discussing the possibilities respondents have in terms of living or moving away from home as they study. This aspect of university life remains significant as participants engage in processes of negotiations with their families to acquire the independence required to live away from home; as such, changes such as living independently encourage the evolution of gender identities. Despite the unequal status that women face with university options, half of my respondents moved away from home to go to university whilst the rest stayed at home during their study years. Studying in one's community/city has shown to be more typical for Muslim women but my study reflects that young women have been able to negotiate with their parents so as to gain permission to leave home for further studies. Ahmad's research (2001) also mentions the difficulty that women may experience in the advent of them deciding to study away from home; parents remain wary of women's reputation out of their community context.

In my study, women who have moved away from home to study have found it easier to still live away to find work after studying. Whilst studying, they have lived in halls of residence or have shared apartments with housemates or friends. As Ahmad (2001) also found, it was easier for women of middle-class backgrounds to move out of home to study as compared to women from working-class backgrounds; women whose parents were educated themselves had no problems with the possibility of girls moving away for studies. If a member of the family, especially a woman (elder sister or cousin) has moved out to study, then it is generally easier for parents to accept that daughters move away to go to university. Respondents who have moved away from home have done so out of choice. Those who have not moved out have either stayed due to parental restrictions or have done so out of choice, so as to save money and be better off financially during their study years.

Parental restrictions, as mentioned earlier, revolve around women's families' fear of their daughters' reputation being tarnished whilst living away from their communities; parents are wary of 'daughters having a social life at university' (Shazia). The patriarchal structure of the South Asian family is evident as women are kept in sight and their freedom

restricted (Brah, 1993); they are not prevented from studying but they are not allowed to do it without supervision. In effect, women hence face a gender bias as opposed to men in their communities, who are given the liberty to study, home or away. As Asma mentions, there are obvious gender differences in the ways parents respond to girls and boys moving away to study:

'My little brother moved away at the exact same time as me, but for my mum it was a big deal to let me go... it's because I'm a girl...definitely, culturally it was always the guys could go away to uni...I don't know if it's a case of trust or if it's just a case of 'Will they be ok? It's scary for a woman to move away, you're alone, and you don't have that protection' (Asma).

This is echoed by Alia and Rubina:

'Parents make you feel that you are different from boys who have more freedom' (Alia).

'It is always because you're a girl and there's not even a proper reason, it's what they think, I'm like 'so what if I'm a girl?' I don't understand, because I'm a girl I can't handle university life?' (Rubina)

Women also maintain that traditionally, marriage is the legitimate reason for women to leave the family home. Nevertheless, as more Muslim women decide to live independently during their university years, parents are 'becoming more liberal' and accepting of this trend, especially with the younger generation, who are forging 'new' gender identities for themselves.

'Everybody's at home. In my family you cannot move away until you're married or have a reason to move away. Nobody moves out until they marry' (Sabina).

Indeed, Sabina stayed home whilst studying at university and left home after she got married. Faiza studied at home for her first degree but moved out to study on campus for her Master's degree:

'Traditionally girls in my family had lived at home and it would have been an issue if I left to study at that time, It was just based on what people did at the time, and then I did my Masters and then moved away...my parents are much more liberal now, like my sister after me, she moved out fast and obviously she's younger than me and I was like 'wow'...if she can move out, then I can as well' (Faiza).

Moreover, parents' restrictive measures are highlighted by participants, whereby such limitations influence their gender identities. Indeed, women feel that parental control can sometimes become overbearing when it comes to university experiences, where parents have different degree levels of maintaining 'control' over their daughters. For instance, Lubaina lives at home and is dropped and picked up from university by her father:

'I'm a girl, I do follow Islamic guidelines, I want to do it properly... my dad at one point said 'Go to Scotland, you've got family there' and then I thought 'No I can't

live there without you guys'. If you're used to living with your immediate family and your extended family, it's like you're an outsider if you don't have family, I knew it would be hard' (Lubaina).

Lubaina is not allowed to commute from Bradford to Leeds by train but is happy to comply with her parents' wishes as she is personally concerned about Islamic propriety and behaviour. On the other hand, Yasmin was disappointed not to have been able to live independently during her medical degree. As she explains:

'I felt in the beginning that I was a bit disadvantaged, I wasn't living on campus but I got to know loads of people cause I got involved in heaps of students' activities...I applied to four medical schools and I got in everywhere and I would have gone to Manchester but then there were issues like moving away would have to be like taking a student loan or have my parents pay and it would have been very expensive so the advantage of living at home was Leeds University is nearby and I'm debt-free which is really good, for a medical student... part of me wanted to move away and I would have been happy to have a fresh start but when it came to filling in forms for other universities my parents didn't help but when it came to Leeds then yeah' (Yasmin).

Moving away would have put a financial strain on her parents. As an alternative, she got fully involved in societies (Medical, Islamic) so that she could 'have the university experience' that she hoped for. Her parents were not supportive of her moving out of home but Yasmin is today thankful to be 'debt-free' before starting her medical career.

As Rubina puts it, at university:

'Women can literally do anything and they want to keep their daughters in check because they need to marry you off and they need you to have a clean slate' (Rubina).

Rubina talks about the difficulty that women face in persuading their parents for them to stay on campus and hence experience the non-academic side of university life. Parents are not bothered about women's education per se 'they don't mind you going somewhere close to home' (Rubina), but are more concerned about what kind of lifestyle their daughters are living. Parents are worried about 'what people are going to say' and they don't want to be giving women scope to live independently, away from the family's gaze. Women having boyfriends, drinking, going clubbing or getting pregnant would have an impact on their family's status in the community and 'these would affect their chances of making a good marriage'. Keeping the cultural, and not the religious tradition of ensuring that girls' reputation remain unblemished results in parents having more bargaining power when it comes to their daughters' marriage prospects.

Moral discourses about 'respectability' directly influence women's social realities, where the honour of the family (izzat), remains an important factor in British South Asian Muslim families. As Rubina, Nadia and Haleema state:

'I think it's got a lot to do with marriage and honour' (Rubina).

'A cultural thing, it's not Islamic where families are forcing you to get married because of the family's status, what are people going to say? About your daughter who's been living away from home, get her married, they do that a lot' (Nadia).

'It's a cultural thing, they always have this fear of if a girl gets raped or if she runs off with somebody then she's never going to get married and she's going to be an outcast from the community, it's the community belief whereas boys even if they are badly behaved and sleep around, they are not seen with the same eyes' (Haleema).

Respecting community norms and not allowing women to move out for the purpose of education is linked to women's marriage prospects. Exposure to the bigger world remains a concern for parents as it may influence women to review their options, especially when it comes to marriage. For instance, Habibah was not allowed to move out from the parental home to go to university as:

'A lot of parents think that if you study, it widens your horizons and your mind and you think a lot of things that maybe you wouldn't if you just went to say college and then get married but obviously they're my parents and you have to listen to them if you're living under their roof and I respect them' (Habibah).

Fatimah had to negotiate, even argue with her parents so as to obtain permission to live independently; gaining her parents' trust proved key to them agreeing:

'My parents fear but not because I'm young but I'm still exploring, there was a compromise, I had to agree to their wishes...for example during my first year, I wasn't allowed to go to a friend's house, like on campuses it's fine as long as they were nearby... especially me being a woman and coming from an all girls' school, I said that I was going to be fine and to just give me a chance to prove that, so it was that little chance, the nudge that you had to push a bit with the parents for your arguments and that is by showing them how you're going to manage yourself and managing myself was tough but I'm doing well' (Fatimah).

Because Fatimah attended a Muslim school, her parents were concerned about her adapting to university life where males and females interact with each other on a regular basis. Having 'reasoned' with them, Fatimah managed to obtain parental permission to live away from home; bargaining for her independence, Fatimah constructs a platform where she manages personal freedom so as not to abuse it. On the other hand, Nazia rebelled against her parents' wishes and moved out from the family home to live on campus. Although from a middle-class background, she expresses her frustration at their lack of understanding:

'Moving out has created a rift between me and my parents...cultural barriers and they make it difficult. They make you choose...you're stuck then....I wear the hijab,

but it's not about that, it's about who you are...I'm actually Pakistani Muslim and I'm British...I might not be as cultural as them but I have my own standards but what it was with my parents, they didn't let us be individuals, like let us be who we wanted to be' (Nazia).

Indeed, Nazia stresses the fact that she is Pakistani Muslim but she is also British. However, as she suggests, 'Pakistani parents forget that you are British'. Since moving out, 'the control stopped' and Nazia went away on holidays, without her parents knowing. This said, Nazia still wears the hijab, does not drink alcohol, eats halal food, fasts during Ramadan and ensures that she only has female housemates. Pushing her 'cultural barriers' as she terms it, she is now free to affirm a British Muslim identity that is closer to her religion, rather than to the Pakistani culture imposed and practised by her parents. Nazia is not unusual in her approach. Indeed, her concerns about parental pressures imposed by family and community are expressed by others in my sample, whereby negotiating to go to university appears to be one of the main areas of contention between parents and daughters.

In deciding whether to move away from home or not for studying, respondents are very subtly negotiating power relationships with their parents, and as a result, re-working their positions as Muslim women in their local communities. Some express the difficulties that may arise if they decide to move out of the family home to study, something that is considered normal and inevitable for non-South Asians in British society. Sabina makes an interesting comparison between parental attitudes to women's independence, highlighting the opposing ends that South Asians and non-South Asians (the term she uses is 'western') assume when it comes to women's freedom:

'Had I got to move into my own place tomorrow, I could be financially independent...but I'm not allowed...I understand and appreciate why the western families do it ...with their women...when you're independent, modern...you are being forced to learn...But you learn from your own lessons rather than learning from your parents' lessons because at the moment if I ever express a wish to have a place of my own...my parents, Asian parents, traditional... would be 'Oh why do you need to?', 'Oh it's so hard!' Sometimes I say 'But you have never let me experience it being so hard'...you just need to do it for yourself' (Sabina).

For Sabina, there is a contrast in being an 'Asian' and a 'western' student in Britain. Although born here, what she understands as university life on campus/living independently is 'modern' and hence, 'western', as opposed to living at home, which is 'traditional' and hence, 'Asian'. As this quote below illustrates, the dichotomy between two cultural traditions 'Asian' and 'western' reflects the tension that some women may face. In agreeing with Sabina, Asma comments on the generational differences that crop up between parents and children in British South Asian Muslim communities, where parents are determined to keep control over daughters:

'Big generation gap, there's a lot of clashes because our parents don't understand that it would be good for me to move away for a year to, like a different country and learn a different language. They just don't' (Asma).

'I moved away from home...my choice... they were hesitant at first... my big sister she stayed at home for uni... my mum's family they were pretty chilled but my dad's family they're fairly backward ...the girls get educated and then they get married off after...when I needed money I usually went home (laugh)...And it was quite nice just to be able to go home...to have that option' (Sadia).

Sadia was happy to be close enough to home, whereby she lived independently during weekdays and visited the family on alternative weekends. Likewise, Bushra opted for an institution where she could drive home. However, coming from an educational background, she claims that in her family, women who move out for educational purposes are not condemned but are encouraged:

'Moving out to go to university is quite accepted and dad went to university himself...and you learn a lot living on your own...I think because my dad went to university so it was fine' (Bushra).

Even though Sadia and Bushra both consider themselves to be from middle-class backgrounds, Sadia experienced some concerns on her parents' part when it came for her to move to university. Her parents are not university educated but have prosperous businesses, as opposed to Bushra, whose parents are both medical practitioners. This is indicative of the fact that there are nuances even in social classes' attitudes towards women and education. Here, it is clear that women's educational backgrounds influence their positions when negotiating their living arrangements for university purposes.

Other participants, however, maintain that they consciously chose to stay home whilst studying. Indeed, unlike women who were not given the option to decide where to live, others benefitted from personal circumstances that offered enough room and scope for them to navigate. They come up with motivational factors that demonstrate agency in them thinking about their future. Financial savings, comfort, moral and emotional support remain the main reasons why women do not wish to live away from the family home during their university years. More importantly, these women were given the options and freewill to decide on their accommodation options. For instance, Haleema was encouraged by her parents to move out but chose to stay home, opting to consider living in a different city or even abroad for postgraduate opportunities:

'Dad suggested Liverpool and I was like 'no way' that would be too much of a distraction and I didn't want to leave, like if I was doing a Masters or a PhD, I might have thought of going quite far but for my Bachelor I didn't want to move. I'm the eldest, I'm really close to my parents so I do get a bit homesick at times but there's a lot of people who don't want to go out of the country for their electives because they don't want to leave home and I'm like 'come on it's just for 10 weeks',

but I'm definitely leaving!' (Haleema).

Aisha, who just finished her degree after having stayed home throughout her study years, is not looking forward to moving away from home for her future hospital placements; she would have to support and look after herself:

'I commute everyday...I lived down in first year and I hated it cause I missed home and I like commuting and when I go home there's food on the table but I'm moving out soon because of placements in West Yorkshire, can be Dewsbury, Leeds, Wakefield, I won't be far but living again in student accommodation' (Aisha).

Likewise, Nuzranah opted to stay at home to study as she would be catered for; the prospect of working part-time whilst studying was not appealing to her:

'I applied close by, I'm not a person who could live away from home...I can't do my own washing and I've never done it ...even work part-time...if it meant a very good university further away then that would be ok and I would come back during the weekends...but my first choice was Leeds and close by unis like Sheffield, Manchester' (Nuzranah).

In choosing to stay home, women are able to better motivate themselves and concentrate on their academic needs, without having to compromise on family and community life. Due to financial advantages of not having to support themselves by living independently, some decide not to work, as opposed to others, who take up part-time employment opportunities for extra-pocket money. This flexibility in deciding on their living arrangements is in stark contrast to respondents' mothers and grandmothers, whose life experiences were almost inevitably shaped by marriage, instead of university experiences, academic challenges and work opportunities. For this generation of South Asian Muslim women in Britain, going to university will shape alternative attitudes towards marriage. Indeed, higher education and building a career are considered prior to marriage, denoting that respondents have begun to alter the gender norm that marriage should automatically follow post compulsory schooling. In the next section, I look more closely at how women are 'negotiating boundaries' at university, and how these processes of negotiations are contributing to the development of new gender identities.

4.4.2 Evolving identities at university: negotiating boundaries

University experiences, as participants claim, have altered their perceptions about themselves, their communities and families. Finding a comfortable space to express their identities without feeling the need to conform to fixed notions of 'race,' culture, ethnicity, gender and religion remains a pertinent issue for respondents. Whether they have moved away or stayed home to study for their degrees, the majority think that they have to navigate

between cultural and religious identities, contested stereotypical racialised and ethnic 'labels' so as to generate new gendered identities:

'Asians here, like my family and family friends, are saying 'you are being whoever you want' and I say 'it's not about being whoever I want to be' but I've got my identity, I'm happy with who I am and just because I don't hold the cultural belief that we should all go to Pakistan at 16 and get married doesn't mean I can't be independent, cause I've got my morals and values, which are more religious' (Saeema).

Some women reflected that the beginning of university life brought up 'confusing states', where they found themselves questioning and assessing their identities to eventually reach a stage of acceptance, hence embracing their new gender positioning. In this process, they develop alternative identities which become contextual, depending on where they are and what they are involved in. Previous research conducted by Knott and Khokher (1993) also reveals how young South Asian Muslim women in Bradford express changing values and attitudes through negotiations of ethnic and religious factors that define their everyday experiences. Indeed, Tasneem reiterates how university culture highlights differences, whereby clashing lifestyles are apparent:

'At uni it just makes things clear and it highlights the differences more than the similarities, for example not drinking, before it was never such an issue cause the friends you had, like under-aged, no one was actually drinking but even if they do, they'll offer you orange juice but uni culture is basically drinking, your social life is about drinking and it's quite a big barrier I would say, clubbing...the differences for me, it was more of a shock...and yes you might want to go to the cinema and bowling but I completely understand why someone would spend the night out clubbing or having a drink as that's what they enjoy more, and why not? So it shows the differences a lot more' (Tasneem).

Participants feel the pressure to embrace university culture but are somehow constrained by their religious convictions or cultural upbringing. For instance, Habibah suggests that peer pressure of 'trying to fit in' at university resulted in her neglecting her cultural identity; being Muslim prevented her from involving herself fully in university life. However, a trip to India during a university placement acted positively on her perceptions, leading her to re-evaluate her social context and recognise that she still values her ethnic identity:

'I wasn't happy to be from...not Muslim background but some of the constraints that you have in being an Asian woman, wasn't happy about that cause you can't be out too late and I wasn't happy and I lost a bit of my cultural identity as I was trying to fit in with everybody and that's what happens if you're working in an environment where people who aren't from ethnic minorities and then when I went to India I realised that actually, I'm proud of my culture, it's different from everybody else's culture and I'm more in touch with my culture now' (Habibah).

To 'live the full university life', Alia moved from Manchester to study in Aberdeen. For her, gaining the experience and skills to live alone and independently, without having to feel the need to go home every weekend and be part of her community, was crucial. Alia hence learned to manage on her own, throughout medical school so that she 'would not have to report to anyone what I'm doing'. On the other hand, Saeema was 'shocked' in moving to York to study:

'I live in a community where there are mostly South Asians and in York, you're the only Asian there! And you're like 'Right, what is happening!?' (Laugh)...but I just learnt so much about myself, about other people...and just about life and now I know... if anything happened with my family, I know I can be independent myself' (Saeema).

Having lived in a close-knit Asian community in Leeds, she describes the exposure she encountered at university, and how this has moulded her personality. Setting out to university, she recounts how she expected to mingle with South Asians but found herself in a totally unexpected setting, where 'whiteness', as opposed to 'Asianess' was the norm; managing differences proved to be a challenge in the beginning. University experiences have given her the opportunity to appreciate multiculturalism within an academic setting, where she evaluates her identity. Women maintain that it is up to them to decide how to behave at university and they make conscious choices of how to integrate amongst diverse cultures, societies and groups. They reiterate the do's and don'ts of university life, which for Muslims, encompass the non-consumption of alcohol, the consumption of halal food and the prohibition of engaging into non-marital relationships i.e. having boyfriends and engaging in sexual activities. Indeed, Shazia talks about the range of options that exist at university, and 'one has to choose between what's right and what's wrong' and 'everybody has a choice'.

Not betraying parents' trust seems to be an important notion for respondents. Even though Shazia goes out socialising with friends in the evenings, her parents are not aware of her activities as she tries to keep those undercover. This is a strategy that women adopt so as to, on the one hand, juggle individual desires and wishes, and on the other, fulfil parental expectations. As Shazia explains, her parents do not know her entire whereabouts but at the same time, there are limits that she imposes on herself when it comes to lifestyle choices such as drinking alcohol. Indeed, Hanah claims that she did not set out to have 'the typical student lifestyle' but was more concerned about getting her degree and ensuring that she had her choice of lifestyle at university. Investing in the future was her priority:

'I don't know about independence, has my education given me independence? It has certainly given me confidence....in terms of being free and doing what you want yes, in a way my chosen career was what I wanted to do but independence in terms of

what goes on today, at university and university life that you go, you have that lifestyle and no, that's not what I got and it wasn't something that I set out to do neither, it was just that I went, did my thing and came back' (Hanah).

Similarly, Faiza reflects on her university experiences. Labelling herself as 'the good Asian girl', she claims that she mainly befriended South Asian girls because they shared similar levels of understandings and like Saeema, talks about her university space as being essentially 'white':

'I was a good Asian girl in the sense that I did not go out clubbing, drinking and so on and then did my Mphil and most of my friends have been Asian but the university I went to was predominantly white' (Faiza).

In a space which is predominantly white, women pick up on racialised identities and make deliberate moves to associate with other 'Asian girls'. Indeed, unlike Saeema, who embraced cultural differences and diversity in friendships, Faiza consciously chose to socialise with 'Asian' girls as she found it easier to communicate and contextualise her sense of 'self' within the South Asian community at university. However, some women are also determined to enjoy university life fully until it is time for them to 'settle down'. Breaking the 'good Asian girl' stereotype, Rahila enjoyed clubbing and socialising whilst at university; once married, she no longer goes out clubbing and is now working full-time and looking after the family.

As for Nadia, she lives at home due to her parents' wishes. However she negotiated with them that she would be allowed to occasionally socialise with friends outside of university campus and course schedules, conditions which her parents agreed to. That said, her parents are not aware that she drinks and goes out clubbing as this would mean restrictions upon Nadia's social life in the future:

'Well I go out! I've got mates in Sheffield and Nottingham and I go and I can stay over, I mean not all the time but I'm allowed to but obviously they won't know that I'm out clubbing and all no! Just because of the negative things that I do with it, it's true, if they find out but I've done it now, the whole drinking thing...that's the western thing' (Nadia).

Some participants are consciously following prescribed parental rules while others 'play the system'. Nadia, nevertheless, makes compromises in ensuring that she lives the 'western' and the 'Muslim' lifestyles simultaneously. Going 'halfway', she has two groups of friends, non-South Asian friends and South Asian friends. With her non-South Asian friends and some South Asian friends, she finds it comfortable and also non-contradictory to 'go out clubbing' and consume alcohol. However, with a group of South Asian Muslim girls, she can also share cultural and religious affinities:

'I've made friends where I can embrace both sides because it would have been difficult if my uni friends didn't embrace both sides like we go to mosque and I don't think if my uni friends didn't all go do it together, I don't think I'd do it on my own but it's an experience we share every week, it's something that keeps us together and we might not see each other for the whole week but that day we will and we will all go together and it's a good feeling, we all feel close' (Nadia).

Having shared cultural and religious experiences on a regular basis at university remain important to respondents. Once a week, Nadia and her Muslim friends go to the mosque to pray. University allows her the possibility to reflect on her individual needs outside the family and community settings that she is used to. She deliberately chooses to maintain a balance in fulfilling her academic and spiritual goals, hence affirming an independent Islamic identity, where she navigates between 'the west' and 'the east' with ease and composure. However, despite negotiation strategies, some women still feel constrained and unable to fully get involved in options that they would essentially be willing to explore whilst at university. For example, Sanaa suggests that she was 'stuck at university'. Sanaa 'was respectful to her parents' when she was still at school but felt that:

'I was missing out, couldn't do what the other girls were doing, so I felt I did nothing and everybody else did everything at university' (Sanaa).

By 'everything', Sanaa means drinking, clubbing, and having boyfriends. So, whilst at university, she rebelled against parental restrictions and experienced all of these. She had relationships at university, with 'English' (White) guys but suggests that she kept them 'casual' so that problems would not arise at a later stage where parents would get involved:

'With boys, going out, staying out all night, drinking, I never did drugs but I do drink so basically that lifestyle, but then I wasn't happy with that, that wasn't me and actually for a while, I didn't want a boyfriend because I thought 'Oh no, what if I fall in love with somebody and he's English?' I'll have to choose between him and my family, back then I really thought it was a big issue so I would go out, mess about but nothing serious' (Sanaa).

There were instances where relationships could have developed but Sanaa felt it was impossible to take them further due to cultural and religious barriers; her parents would never accept that she considers a non-Muslim and non-Asian British boyfriend as marriage material. Today, Sanaa still dates 'English' guys with no intention of settling down with them. University hence provides women with spaces where contestations occur. As they navigate 'cultural' and 'religious' boundaries, respondents demonstrate agency in the choices they make with regards to which social activities to embrace at university, and which ones to reject. Indeed, decisions about drinking alcohol, socialising and having relationships are very carefully negotiated by young women. Their negotiations are informed by personal choices, as well as family and community ethos that promote cultural gendered norms which prescribe particular modes of behaviour which respondents are

expected to honour. As such, participants develop strategies to negotiate their social experiences at university, thereby generating new gender identities as they decide how to position themselves within the wider context of university life. In my study, participants also maintain that peer pressure at university influences the ways in which they decide to affirm their identities as they learn to navigate the ‘differences’ and the ‘similarities’ (amongst students) they encounter on university campuses. All these factors influence how women decide to affirm their identities on campus. In the next section, I explore respondents’ involvement in university student societies, with a particular focus on Islamic Societies at university. This discussion reveals how respondents, through student societal groups, negotiate their ways around activities, thereby further highlighting the impact that social experiences have in generating women’s gender identities.

4.4.3 Student societies at university: Islamic societies (ISOC) on campus

Many respondents were involved in student societies (extra-curricular activities) that allowed them to meet fellow students who shared similar interests. Social groups/organisations at university provide university students with resources to form associations which contribute greatly to the social aspects of university life. These offer opportunities for Muslim women to get involved and be exposed to possible avenues (activities/outings/friendships/relationships) which family and community do not essentially want respondents to experience. Social groups therefore provide respondents with the freedom and agency to decide how to manage their university life; such power enables them to develop links out of their community or family circle, hence opening up spaces to produce new identities. In my study, women who moved away from home to go to university find societies useful as they provide the necessary network and support system that students need to adapt to university life, especially to those enrolled in their first academic year (‘freshers’).

The most common groups in which women tend to participate more remains the South Asian societies (Pakistani/Indian/Bengali) and respondents rely on them to maintain cultural identity through parties, movies and organised outings. Others, though a minority, signed up for sporting activities (badminton, volleyball, netball), societies which enable women to meet other students of both genders; medical students find these particularly appealing as they befriend non-medical students, hence taking off the pressure and the competition among medical students for a while. However, women like Aisha, once active, re-adjust their social life according to lifestyle changes and changes in their religious inclinations or beliefs. Indeed, since adopting the jilbab, Aisha modified her social activities

on campus to better suit her needs. Clearly, her religious needs and religious identity take precedence over any other social identities:

'I used to play when I didn't wear the jilbab but not anymore because it's not practical... I used to play squash, cricket and basketball, a bit of a tomboy but I like male sports but had to give a lot of that up since I started wearing the jilbab but Alhamdulillah I still do it at home. I just finished my Arabic course, I did that in Bradford and I picked up a sewing course as well' (Aisha).

'Because I didn't come from a traditional medicine background, I didn't go to a grammar school or anything, I kind of work for a thing called WAMS in Leeds Uni...it's for medical students, run by medical students, to encourage people from non privileged backgrounds to get into medicine, apply to uni. It just gives them a different perspective, and just like encouraging them as their parents might not have gone to university' (Zainab).

Women also signed up for non-campus activities and voluntarily work for organisations that help young people. For instance, Zainab, reflecting on her own experiences, explains that her work is important as it will enable more and more students to consider higher education as a viable option after compulsory schooling. As for Yasmin, despite her workload, she is extremely active in extra-curricular activities; she is part of the ISOC as well as a Students' Union Representative as she believes that university life is not merely about acquiring a degree but also about participating in social groups so as to make a difference:

'I do a lot of things apart from medicine...it doesn't define entirely who I am and I'm involved in Islamic work at the local mosque...got involved in inter-faith activities, with non-Muslim societies, as they promote cohesion on campus, like we are different but we can co-exist, I'm also involved in the Leeds marrow society, encouraging people to get involved into registering for the marrow register and this year I was in the like, women in surgery representative, there's a society for that and union representative as well, representing students. I can't just stay at home and if I don't like something I will try and change it, just being pro-active about things and so there's a lot of opportunity on campus to do' (Yasmin).

Yasmin, a practising Muslim wearing the hijab, encourages other women to join inter-faith societies as she believes that inter-faith programs maintain 'cohesion'; even though Yasmin affirms a religious identity by being active in the ISOC, she also recognises the importance of working with non-Muslim societies so as to signal the positive recognition of 'difference' on campus. In my study, all respondents were formal members of the Islamic societies (ISOC), with the exception of one respondent who made it clear that she had no intention of joining the society. A few of my respondents were part of the Islamic Society committee board, and hence, extremely active on campus (Leeds University campus) whilst others remained passive members and attended events such as Eid or iftar (breaking of fast) parties during the month of Ramadan. Indeed, the varying degrees in which respondents decide to get involved within the ISOC reflect the differences that exist in how women decide to

express their religious affiliations and religious identities on campus. As Tasneem and Asma maintain:

'I am part of the Islamic society but then when interesting things come up then you go, but it's more like belonging to the society rather than really regular sort of involvement and attendance' (Tasneem).

'There was an Islamic society. It wasn't anything big, it was just like...it had a prayer room, and you could go as you wanted, you could come and go as you pleased, and in Ramadan they used to do iftar. But apart from that, there was, I mean, nothing else really. And because I was living at home as well, I didn't have a lot of time after university, so I couldn't commit to anything' (Asma).

For Fatimah, an active member of the ISOC in Bradford and the events' organiser on the board, doing voluntary work is necessary and useful on one's CV. Her involvement as a board member of the ISOC is a conscious effort for her to improve her chances when it comes to future employment. Furthermore, every member is given a 'fair chance' of getting involved and Fatimah seized the opportunity:

'For a CV it's necessary so that's voluntary work, it is very highlighted in the working environment, people really enjoy somebody's CV if they've got something to offer because time is money and giving up your time is valued' (Fatimah).

My study shows that Islamic Societies on campus act as a terrain for identity formation and negotiation for young women exploring the spaces of educational settings. They are also spheres where women not only express their religious identities, but become spheres for politicised Islamic identities. Such environments therefore encourage the construction and contestation of British South Asian Muslim identities. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, within the student societies funded by Student Unions (The University of Leeds) the two Islamic societies, the ISOC and the ABSOC, remain separate. Comparing experiences of Islamic societies from her local mosque and the one at university for which she is an active fundraiser, Nazia reiterates the differences in their approaches, whereby at university, women may adopt individual modes of behaviour and clothing, and hence, express individualistic expressions of their religious identities:

'My parents wanted me to go to the mosque every Sunday, and I was like 'I don't want to go'...I'm 19 years old and it's like the old Islamic society, all these women and so many restrictions when going, like don't wear make-up, don't wear jackets, wear long cardigans, most people there wear jilbabs, so they are fully covered, not the niqab necessarily but they're fully covered and I cannot wear what I want, not everybody covers their face but they generally wear loose clothes whereas me I'm never fully covered, you can see my sleeves they're not fully down, I cover to the extent where I feel it's possible for me to cover, but I don't find it necessary to fully go in' (Nazia).

Likewise, Saeema formally founded the Islamic society at her university and reformed some of the activities which the previous society offered. Instead of focusing inherently on religious talks, organising activities as a group helped gather more members:

'I was the only Muslim there at the time so it was really hard and I joined the Islamic society which because it was in York, it didn't really exist...I mean there were just 3 people there and I know there are more Muslims in York and I said well, we have to do something about this cause people, especially in their first year, they need help, so in my second year I became part of the committee and we organised loads of stuff and I think because of the religious meetings, I think this used to stop people because every week they used to have religious talks...there are people who don't want a religious talk every evening...so we did other things, I don't mean we went clubbing but we went to movies and bowling getting to know each other for meals and more members started coming...at the same time we had the religious talks and all that cause some people want that but it's just that people have that choice and then there's an alternative for them' (Saeema).

Due to her experiences, Fawzia, quoted below, states how she was made to feel 'different', and abused as an 'infidel' by a male member of the ABSOC at Bradford University. As a Sunni Muslim, her presence was not welcomed for that event (talk). This exemplifies the tensions that exist amongst Muslim identities on university campuses, whereby the radicalisation of faith manifests itself within extreme and separatist notions begging the question of what it means to be Muslim in Britain. Indeed, experiences of Islamic societies on campus generate a diversity of perceptions for different people:

'I went to that event and I was asked 'what kind of a Muslim are you?' and I was like 'what do you mean what kind? I'm not a breed you know' and there was this random guy standing in the entrance as I was coming in and all the women were taking off their shoes and everyone was and I was going in and I put a duppata over my head for respect, but obviously that wasn't good enough and that guy he stopped me and he said 'what kind of Muslim are you sister?', and I was like 'what' and he said 'what kind?' and I was like 'oh do you mean Sunni and Shia?' and the thing is my mum always told me not to differentiate and she just said 'you're Muslim that's it' and you don't need to think further than that and I know about it and I just said 'well I'm Sunni' and he said 'what kind of Sunni?' and I didn't know, I just have my own belief and it's my own interpretation of everything, my parents' interpretation of everything and he was like 'oh how do you pray, can I ask you?' and I was like 'what?' and he said 'let me just clarify things, I'm from Alhulbay't Society', never heard of it before and he said 'we are a special type of Muslims and I laughed actually, I thought he was joking and I told him 'yeah I think I'm a special type of Muslim as well' and he was so serious when I was just laughing and I stopped and said 'don't actually understand what your point is' and he said 'thing is, it's our job to preserve our people from the people who endanger us' (Fawzia).

Fawzia was also chastised for not wearing the hijab and this put into question her allegiance to Islam:

'I remember him saying 'you obviously don't wear hijab so you don't pray do you?' and I was like 'what, this is none of your business' and he was like 'ok say that you have recited this surah once in your life, do you know that you should keep safe

from people who lead you astray?’ and I told him ‘are you insinuating that I am leading people astray by being a Muslim? And he said ‘no sister, I’m not insinuating, I’m saying’ and he suddenly shouting ‘kafir’ (infidel) in my face and everyone just stopped and stared at him and I was so humiliated by everything and I just picked out my shoes and ran out of there’ (Fawzia).

Clearly, for some students and members of these societies, the hijab is considered to be compulsory for Muslim women. Again, the pressure to conform is evident in these circumstances. More importantly, some students belonging to groups such as these feel threatened by Muslims like Fawzia. Indeed, Fawzia manifests different allegiances to her faith and is comfortable expressing alternative versions of her faith. It is evident, from her quote, that the expression of Muslim identities in the context of Islamic societies encourages a collective approach, bordering religious dogma, to their members who would feel a sense of belonging only if they abide by what is perceived as appropriate in order to fit in with a ‘type of Muslim’. Social groups such as Islamic identities may lead respondents to think about how they position themselves as Muslim women within their educational spaces. More importantly, they portray the existing differences among participants as women challenge and contest fixed notions of Muslimness on campus, as they get involved in Islamic societies at university. The differences experienced by respondents through the Islamic societies highlight the tensions and contradictions they encounter as they generate Islamic identities on campus.

In this section, in focusing on respondents’ university experiences, I highlighted the various ways in which young women in my study are participating in university life so as to develop new gender identities. Firstly, as they negotiate whether to live at home or away during their studies, respondents illustrate how they are bargaining with their parents so as to challenge gendered cultural norms within their communities; in effect, for this generation of Muslim women, their university experiences and the independence gained from living independently may shape different attitudes they have about life options such as having professional careers and marriage. Secondly, in encountering diverse social experiences on university campuses, respondents are ‘negotiating boundaries’ by learning to navigate ‘religious’ and cultural’ boundaries. For instance, social activities such as drinking alcohol and having relationships as they engage with Muslims and non-Muslims on campus remain terrains where participants consciously and actively decide what mode of behavior to adopt. Thirdly, through respondents’ involvement within student societies, in particular the ISOC, respondents’ motives to be either active or passive members of such religious organisations demonstrate the multiple ways in which women exhibit their religious identities at university. Their experiences of Islamic societies reflect instances where women may feel included through events such as gatherings held during Ramadan, whilst also feel excluded

if they do not adhere to specific dress codes such as the hijab, as epitomised by Fawzia's experience. In the concluding section of this chapter, I examine how respondents are 'pushing gendered' boundaries within the spaces of higher education as they assert new gender identities; as such, I look at how their notions around marriage are changing as they consider educational and professional careers.

4.5 PUSHING GENDERED BOUNDARIES

With Muslim women's apparent visibility on university campuses, Muslim women are pushing gendered boundaries by navigating new educational and employment options. In so doing, women remain aware that they are setting new trends for Muslim women in Britain, as they navigate options to choose university degrees, career paths, live at home or away and get involved in university life. To further comprehend women's agency to form new gender boundaries, I wanted to analyse the intergenerational shifts that educated Muslim women are currently experiencing in Britain in relation to education and employment. This remains important as it demonstrates that through these intergenerational changes, respondents' gender identities are evolving as they assert new ones. I therefore asked respondents whether they thought there were differences in the ways women in their family (grandmothers and mother) perceive education and work. All of them claim that the differences are noticeable; women then had limited or no other option but to get married. Most importantly, when respondents were asked whether changes in educational achievements or work were apparent for men in their family across the generations (grandfathers, father, brothers), they all maintain that they cannot perceive massive differences as men are more likely to inherit businesses or go straight into employment. Indeed, as many respondents suggest, their male cousins or brothers were not heavily concerned with university degrees, although some had degrees. Nevertheless, for men in the family, not going to university was considered an option, as opposed to my respondents, who would not compromise on attending university. This portrays women's aspirations as fully geared towards education rather than non-professional employment or marriage.

'For sure...my grandmother was married at 13, and had her first child at 16. My mum went to school for a year and then married at 16. And I often talk to my mum and she always says 'when I was your age I had 4 kids' and I'm like 'Oh God'...I'm still a child you can just see the difference and we don't plan on getting married for a few years yet...and my mum could speak English, like broken, and she can read a bit but that's just a year at school, not educated at all' (Saeema).

The changes in women's lifestyles are hence apparent. Women's grandmothers had no or extremely limited education, while many of my respondents' mothers had basic levels of education (compulsory education), with the exception of five mothers who had university

degrees. If mothers were interested in work or studying for courses, these were usually done after marriage and in some cases, after migration to the UK from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Women's grandmothers tended to get married at around 13 to 16 years of age on average, while their mothers married in their late teens and early twenties, between 16 to 23 years of age. Married women in this research got married in their mid to late twenties, between 24 to 28 years of age; they all had university degrees before their marriages and they are all currently working. This in itself portrays that Muslim women in Britain are nowadays marrying a decade later than their grandmothers did.

'My mum is such an intelligent woman and she never got the chance. She got married and she had kids. Her husband was from Pakistan and they all had that mentality which means that she missed out on so much...She knew that she'd have to stay at home, have kids, and take care of her husband, cook, clean and that's it. She knew she was going to be a housewife, and two of my aunties, they went to school in Scotland, but they stopped at high school, they didn't go to university. And that's because they never had the option... taking my parents into consideration and my aunties and uncles, their lives, going from that...ours in completely different. And it's such a big generation gap...Even to the way we are, the way we dress, and the fact that we've all gone to university, and we've got careers' (Asma).

Indeed, Asma highlights that women of her mother's generation were not given another option apart from 'becoming a housewife'; for her, 'Pakistani mentality', meaning cultural tradition, acted as hurdle for women like her mother. Likewise, other respondents agree with this principle, adding that financial constraints contributed heavily to their lack of resources to follow educational routes. Nowadays, students, like most respondents in my study, depend on student loans and weekly allowances to survive their university years.

'Mum went to uni, and school in Pakistan and then got married to Dad so that's evolved...like my granddad was well educated for his time and made sure my Mum and her sisters all went to uni and stuff, if they had brothers or husbands encouraging education then they had more chances of education' (Sadia).

In contrast, for participants' mothers who went to university, women view it as an uncommon phenomenon of their time. As Sadia expresses, having a male figure, mothers' own fathers, brothers or husbands in the family who approved of and encouraged their mothers to study made all the difference. Fawzia describes her mother as a 'radical mother', who transgressed all expectations to be able to get a degree:

'My mother thought that she was unmarriedable because she was the first in her generation to want to do a degree and she went against her parents to do it and her eldest brother financed everything for her because my mum's dad died when she was like 13 and she was the youngest daughter and my grandmother wanted to see her settled but she finished her degree and then she married my dad at 24...she did really well for herself but for us, I think it's more of an expectation to do it whereas for her it was the expectation of not to do it, so it was the complete opposite'(Fawzia).

All unmarried women in my research want to finish their studies and get a job before thinking of getting married. Gaining financial independence before marriage to them remains important. Women like Haleema and Tasneem have also suggested that in this day and age, it is important that both partners work in a couple so that the family can be better off economically. This may hence explain the intergenerational shifts relating to more Muslim women opting to pursue educational and work careers; respondents' evolution in perceptions about education and work challenge marriage and children as being the sole life ambition of women. In some cases, even though grandmothers were not encouraging of their daughters' choices to study, they remain extremely proud of the fact that their granddaughters have got degrees and are working. As Yasmin states:

'Because women have been challenged in the past, like for example my grandma she would never have been able to go to university and I know that so for me I'm more motivated to push myself'. ...the weird thing is my grandma loves the fact that I'm at university and I guess it's because her approach to education has changed and I mean she can read Urdu and I think she realised over time that if you've got a grand-daughter who is a doctor you don't question that (Laugh)'.

Aisha also understands the progression of women's educational and professional careers as a movement:

'I've seen that people have become more and more driven to go to university and studying good degrees and that's amazing, like 10 years ago, hardly anyone was going to university and it's the same with the hijab, 10 years ago nobody was wearing the hijab and I think in that sense it has changed so much and people have become more aware that education has become important' (Aisha).

Bringing it to a more personal level, Aisha, who wears the jilbab, makes an interesting comparison between women going to university and women wearing the hijab in the UK. Here, Aisha equates the rate of Muslim women entering into higher education with the rate of Muslim women wearing the hijab. For her, women's freedom to have access to educational opportunities as well as freedom to publicise their Islamic faith in Britain are inter-related. Even if higher education is regarded as important and is encouraged by themselves and their families, women may still feel constrained when assessing their educational aspirations. Indeed, in desiring to fulfil educational aims, women's re-assertion of a new gender identity might not always play in their favour.

Indeed, they express their concerns about the limits of educational achievements, as opposed to Singh's (1990) study, which suggests that higher education improves women's chances in the 'marriage market'. My research findings tally with Ahmad's (2001) study, where the contradiction of 'being too educated' is highlighted by my respondents. Describing it as 'conflicting interests, a double-bind situation', Ahmad's (2001: 147) study also shows the predicament faced by Muslim daughters as far as degree levels are concerned

when it comes to their marriage prospects. Ahmad (2001) mentions cases of women 'being too educated', a situation that hinders the flow of marriage proposals or the interest of families to approach women with higher educational status. Indeed, from my research, although Farha (quoted below) reiterates the importance that higher education has in opening up options for women, she also mentions the potential risks that education may entail in relation to women's marriage options. Being 'too educated' means being labelled and categorised as a woman who has rejected marriage for education. On the other hand, Fawzia maintains that having an education remains extremely important when it comes to marriage:

'I mean you can't go anywhere without education...for your career and for your marriage prospects as well, shouldn't be but you know it does come in' (Fawzia).

Interestingly, women have to also think about the extent to which they want to be educated so as to find the right balance and a degree of acceptance in their communities. The degree of education a woman acquires seems to always be juxtaposed with her marriage options; too little education can limit one's options and too much education can put people off:

'There's someone who came to see me last year, he came with his daughter who wanted to do her bar and he wanted some advice. So basically he wanted to hear from me that it wasn't worth it. That's what he really wanted me to say to his daughter. She had just finished her LLB and wanted to go abroad for a year. He was a civil servant, well educated himself...she was twenty-one. I asked her whether she wanted to come back to do her pupillage and she kept saying 'depending on my situation'. And I said 'what do you mean your situation?' – which basically meant 'whether I'm married or not' (Farha).

As Farha suggests, being 'in a situation' means not being married yet. This 'situation' signifies that a woman needs to make a choice between education and marriage. Farha recounts an episode where her advice about higher education and consequently, her position as an unmarried woman in employment was sought. Hanah, quoted below, also illustrates the tension that exists between education and marriage, where the decision to carry on with further studies such as postgraduate qualifications must be weighed against marriage options. As this shows, too much education is not encouraged as marriage must be considered alongside educational aspirations. Women think that a compromise has to be reached between study and family life. Indeed, Hanah suggests:

'I'm going down that route, that path of education, education, education and work for money but there are other areas of my life that I need to fulfil so it's that path that I'm kind of concerned about going on too focused and then lose interest in other areas and I think we need to have a balance, especially with Asian women' (Hanah).

When asked about what she means when she talks about ‘Asian women’ with respect to education and work, Hanah draws on the cultural expectations that families and communities have when it comes to women; getting married and raising children still remains a priority in British South Asian Muslim communities and in some cases, educated unmarried women feel the pressure to settle down and have children. As she exclaims ‘the culture is such that this is what they want you to do’. Hanah’s views can be perceived as renegotiating gender norms so as to fit her personal expectations (individual needs) as well as fulfil normative gender roles (community expectations). Becoming wives and mothers has precedence over acquiring education, and the independence that comes with it. She categorises ‘Asian women’ and subtly adheres and perpetuates constructed notions of Asian womanhood. Indeed, for unmarried women in this research, marriage is inevitable as they expect it to happen in the coming years, once they settle in their careers. Dwyer and Shah’s (2009) sample also demonstrates similar notions around marital expectations, where marriage remains a reality.

‘There are a lot of girls out there who are looking to get married and they just cannot find anyone because guys want somebody who is a convenience and a woman with ambition is not always a convenience. I come from a family where the mum has always worked and that’s normal and my brother doesn’t have a problem marrying a working wife, but most boys my age have not had a working mother and had a mum who has doted on them and that’s what they expect in a wife so there’s a big mismatch between boys’ expectations in my generation and girls’ expectations, and that’s why the number of Muslim women who are approaching their 30s are still not married and it’s just increasing’ (Yasmin).

Yasmin exemplifies how generational changes in women’s roles in South Asian Muslim communities may affect their marriage options. It appears that in households whereby men are used to women working, the former would find it easier to contemplate having a ‘working wife’. However, according to Yasmin, with regarding her generation, men’s expectations follow the pattern of women as homemakers. Nevertheless, respondents are not ready to comply with this notion that gender roles in marriage are fixed; consequently, this gender gap and differences in respondents’ marital expectations may result in women struggling to find marriageable partners who would be agreeable to their future wives’ educational achievements:

‘What annoys me the most is that it’s easy to listen to those religious people saying these women are wasting time with education and they’re putting marriage on the back seat and they’re becoming all ambitious...but they’re not thinking that marriage is between two people coming together, not one person doing whatever they want and the other person straying along’ (Yasmin).

Moreover, Yasmin points out the role of ‘religious people’ in perpetuating such gendered expectations in her community. In questioning the discrimination that women encounter,

Yasmin is also redefining meanings of marriage for Muslim women of her generation as their educational interests rise. As women are choosing higher education over marriage, and ultimately, pushing the gendered norms in their communities, I asked them whether their choices to go into higher education have affected any plans to marry. The majority of respondents maintain that marriage has been delayed as they opted to go to university; two respondents suggest that this has not been the case as they met their husbands at university, and married just after having finished their degrees.

I also asked participants if higher education has influenced marriage prospects for them. Most respondents reiterate that the choice of marriage partners is an area where they think they have more power to express an authority in terms of who they wish marry. Marrying an 'educated' partner seems to be an extremely important factor for participants, demonstrating that young women are ready to exercise freewill when it comes to marriage partners. Their views highlight that access to higher education, paid employment, upward social mobility and choice of marriage partners remain significant factors that work together to alter the gendered identities of British South Asian Muslim women.

'I think it will... I know this sounds wrong but I wouldn't want to marry a cleaner...not because I think they're lower but I'm thinking of the future, especially in the society we are living now, how am I going to support my kids? I need someone who is on a similar wavelength and wage so we can be comfortable' (Saeema).

Indeed, Saeema talks about the benefits of marrying someone who has also been to university. In not only looking at the practical financial gains, Saeema is convinced that to be able to better provide for the future generation, being on a 'similar wavelength' with one's partner is important. This means that in having more or less the same status between wife and husband, respondents expect a more equitable gender relationship between spouses, hence definitely accounting for women's evolving gender identities:

'I would not like to marry somebody who would be uneducated because I would like my husband to want our kids to go to university and push them' (Shazia).

'I know girls who have really liked a guy and then said no because he doesn't have a degree which I think is stupid, what you need in somebody more than anything is that firstly their religion is important to them and secondly that they understand you for who you are, if you have a degree it helps cause you have been through the same experiences but it's not the most important thing, my dad doesn't have a degree and my mum's done a PhD so that's a huge gap isn't it? But they have so much in common so that's what makes a marriage work' (Yasmin).

As opposed to Shazia, Yasmin does not think that education should be a pre-requisite when considering marriage. For her, marriage prospects are not considerably affected by the fact that she now practices medicine. Yasmin's parents have different

educational levels and taking that as an example, Yasmin maintains that religion should take priority over educational achievements when considering marriage. Other respondents acknowledge the importance of Islam when considering marriage but nevertheless, consider higher education as an extremely important attribute to have in a partner. Going back to the strategy of women using education and work so as to encourage upward social mobility, Shazia reiterates that an educated partner will also provide considerable support to her children in ensuring that the latter develop an interest for education, thereby showing that women have clear expectations they hope to fulfill when considering marriage.

‘For girls, it’s impressive to be able to say ‘this is what my daughter or daughter-in-law does’, there’s a bit of a token for it. At the end of the day it’s the guy’s responsibility to earn and provide and it is the girl’s responsibility to look after the home but you have to be able to cross over and education gives you that’ (Sabina).

Interestingly, Sabina still believes in the traditional gendered concepts of the male as breadwinner and female as homemaker even though women with an education appear to be highly regarded in her community. However, having the option to ‘cross over’ provides women with possible ways to maneuver gender roles so as to adjust to their subjective beliefs and needs. Ultimately, education provides women with the necessary bargaining power to embrace joint responsibilities. Indeed, as this section demonstrates, young Muslim women are pushing gendered boundaries as they actively evaluate their options of higher education and employment. As a result, their experiences of educational and professional careers impact on their expectations of marriage. As respondents reveal, issues around ensuring a career before marriage, having agency in the choice of marriage partner, and being able to have the option to navigate gender roles in marriage are all indicators of how British South Asian Muslim women are developing and asserting new gender identities.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how respondents’ gender identities are evolving through the spheres of higher education and paid employment. This chapter has shown how young British South Asian Muslim women are exploring boundaries as they navigate educational and employment settings and in so doing, push gendered boundaries to produce new gender identities. As respondents decide to challenge community concerns about women going into higher education, young women are in effect breaking the ‘traditional’ gendered concepts of Muslim womanhood within their communities so as to assert new gender identities. Their early negotiations of gender identities within educational and paid employment settings therefore prefigure later negotiations, for example, the marriage process. Educational and employment settings shape new contexts for these young women as they attempt to negotiate new gender identities. As young women progress through

education and employment, they gain greater independence which may not necessarily lead them to reject marriage but may impact on how they formulate new expectations of marriage, for example, their choice of marriage partners or their decisions about when to marry. An insight into why young women are increasingly considering education and paid employment as viable paths remains indicative of the active ways in which gender identities are being re-worked and generated within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain.

First, I have explored the routes taken by respondents as they negotiate their educational careers. More specifically, I highlighted the early negotiations of young women to enter educational spaces as they negotiate the existing gendered differences in parental and community attitudes towards education for women and men within British South Asian Muslim communities. My findings have shown that the gender inequalities in how families respond to Muslim women's and men's wishes to pursue educational goals remain potent; this indicates that women do not benefit from equal access to education within their communities, thereby suggesting that they have to actively negotiate with their families so as to be able to embrace educational careers. However, even though my research shows gender inequalities in parental views about education, it also reveals that in cases where women benefit from parents' and siblings' support, achieving educational and career goals proved easier. Also, although respondents are from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and have different experiences of study and work, my study demonstrates that all young women still have to negotiate parental expectations so as to embrace educational and employment careers. Indeed, as some women's priority is to negotiate going to university in the first place, others reach compromises about living home or away during university years.

Second, in exploring why respondents are choosing to go into higher education and ultimately, employment, the motivational factors encouraging participants to consider higher education and paid employment reveal how respondents are actively evaluating and balancing their options so as to develop new gender identities as British South Asian Muslim women. In maintaining that education provides economic security, respondents reiterate the importance of being financially independent and ultimately, be in a position to move up the social ladder. For some respondents, it is expressed as fulfilling their Islamic duty in seeking knowledge, eventually helping the future generations to recognise the importance of education due to their roles as 'educated mothers'.

Third, I focused on how respondents' university experiences are shaping and altering their gender identities. In particular, I looked at participants' choices of accommodation whilst studying as this remains an area which reveals women's negotiations of university options. In fact, their navigations of university life indicate how respondents

are evolving within their educational social contexts. As they decide how to manage social activities such as drinking alcohol or having relationships at university, respondents demonstrate that they remain very careful in negotiating 'cultural' and 'religious' boundaries. As such, they reveal that peer pressure may impact on their modes of behaviour at university as they navigate social activity options to partake in, and who to befriend. Indeed, while some participants do not cross boundaries imposed by community cultural norms, others choose to experience activities such as drinking alcohol and socialising (for example 'clubbing') without their parents knowing. In effect, respondents' involvement in social groups at university demonstrates that they juggle multiple identities as they encounter spaces where they meet students from different backgrounds, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In fact, my focus on participants' involvement in student societies such as Islamic societies on campus reveals the diversity in the range of experiences felt by respondents. As they negotiate peer groups, perceptions remain subjective, whereby women may generate individual as well as collective identities. Indeed, as some respondents maintain that Islamic societies help them feel included as they adhere to an Islamic identity on campus due to shared events/activities organised by these societies, others reflect on how such societies may act as a space of exclusion due to the differences they portray in the ways in which they choose to depict their faith; as Fawzia has described, to attend an event organised by an Islamic society and not wearing the hijab results in her being judged by some Muslim students on campus. These contestations encourage respondents to develop new gender identities as they make decisions and choices informing their university experiences.

Finally, I elaborated on how participants are pushing gendered boundaries through education and paid employment and as such, generate new gender identities. In reflecting upon the intergenerational differences that participants experience when they compare their educational/work achievements to that of their mothers and grandmothers, respondents reiterate how gendered roles have dramatically altered. Ultimately, these changes lead women to assert new gender identities. Indeed, respondents illustrate how women of the previous generations had limited options, whereby marriage remained the primary route for women in their families. On the contrary, as respondents delay marriage, gendered boundaries are being pushed and questioned as they decide to move into higher education and employment. In fact, young women in my study portray their motives and enthusiasm to contest cultural ideologies so as to open up new spaces which allow them to embrace university education and employment. Cultural constraints that hinder educational aspirations are questioned by respondents, while Islamic concepts about the importance of

education for Muslims are embraced as participants manifest an array of ways in which their Muslim identities are sustained at university.

As young women gain the confidence to challenge expected cultural norms through university and work experiences, they assert new gender identities which are impacting in the ways in which they understand marriage, and the gender roles within it; respondents' aspirations of marriage seem to indicate that their expectations of marriage revolve around more egalitarian notions of gender roles in marriage. For instance, respondents reiterate how having the option to pursue professional careers after marriage remains important to them, thereby showing how respondents are re-working marital gender roles within British South Asian Muslim communities. Individual efforts made by women to develop new gender identities show differences amongst them, hence portraying the heterogeneity of Muslim identities generated by respondents in this study. Participants are re-evaluating their positioning and manifest awareness for Islamic principles that would not prevent them from achieving academic aspirations and career choices. Through higher education and employment, respondents are therefore redefining spaces where 'cultural' and 'religious' boundaries are evaluated and re-negotiated. Indeed, through the spaces of higher education and employment, they are exploring boundaries, leading them to develop new gender identities which impacts on other life options such as marriage. In the next chapter, I focus on how educated British South Asian Muslim women contest and construct their Muslim identities within the wider context of British society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Managing ‘Muslimness’: Contesting and Constructing South Asian Muslim Identities in Britain

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on how British South Asian Muslim women contest and construct their identities in the context of their daily experiences of higher education and work. It provides a platform to extend the themes around Muslim women’s evolving identities, which I developed in the previous chapter; I look at how the experiences of higher education and work are opening up questions about identity in new ways for Muslim women as they evaluate their own gendered identities, and the possible impacts this process may have on their future life options. Indeed, as they reshape their identities and become assertive in affirming these identities, they ultimately develop new attitudes towards the meanings they attribute to marriage. In fact, in this chapter, I contend that educational settings are leading respondents to rethink the meanings of ‘Muslim’ and ‘South Asian’, different aspects of their gender identities, as they encounter a wider range of people at university. Indeed, spaces such as university or work lead participants to develop critical frameworks where they negotiate, contest, construct and assert new gender identities. Here, in particular, I analyse how research participants manage their Muslim identities, hence drawing on the boundaries involved in managing Muslimness.

By ‘manage’, I refer to the ways in which respondents consciously and actively handle the different aspects of their Muslim identities. Based on Hall’s (1992) theoretical concept of identity as being relational and contextual, I frame my argument within this notion that identities are not fixed categories; they can be manipulated through negotiations of different social spaces. This idea of negotiating identities in context is exemplified through the ways in which young Muslims in the UK navigate the different strands of their identities. More specifically, the notion of hybrid, hyphenated or multiple identities, as stipulated in previous studies (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991; Modood *et al.*, 1994; Dwyer, 2000; Kawale, 2003; Werbner, 2004; Geaves, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Hopkins, 2007), are indicative of the ways in which Muslims in Britain manoeuvre their social contexts so as to manage different aspects of their social identities. In effect, Pieterse (1995: 45, quoted in Caglar 1997: 172) explains this concept of hybridisation of identities as ‘the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices’. This notion that identity formation is dynamic and changing reflects the agency involved as Muslim women cope with the diverse aspects of their

identities so as to produce ‘new’ ones. In this chapter, I therefore argue that Muslim women are actively managing ideas of Muslimness in order to define and affirm their Muslim identities as they explore educational and work spaces. Yet, I also point out that Muslimness, for respondents, is explored through an array of other inter-twining social identities, notably, citizenship, ethnic, and racialised categories which inform their views and meanings of Muslimness in multicultural Britain. In essence, through these interactions, I assess how participants navigate their identities so as to generate new gender identities as British South Asian Muslim women.

This study explores the evolution of ethnic minority women’s experiences and their gender identities as they negotiate their social contexts; indeed, this thesis focuses on how British born Muslim women of South Asian origin navigate multicultural British society so as to produce new identities. In being the second-generation of South Asian Muslim migrants in Britain, respondents’ notions of belonging are informed by South Asia culture (inherited from their parents) as well as British culture (as British citizens). I therefore think it is important here to briefly outline the core concepts around citizenship so as to provide a framework on which to found my analysis of respondents’ identities in relation to notions of citizenship and national belonging. Citizenship, as a concept, is complex and unstable. Indeed, notions around citizenship remain contingent to nation-states’ positions on issues around inclusion and exclusion from membership of a nation-state, whereby processes of migration and globalisation influence policies around who must be included and excluded as ‘citizen’ of a nation-state (Marston and Mitchell, 2004; Brubaker, 1992). Nonetheless, citizenship is most often defined as an individual benefiting from certain rights and duties from a political community; citizenship then epitomises a legal aspect (for instance obligations and rights), as well as a cultural and social construct (for instance who belongs) (Isin, 2002). Here, I therefore use the term ‘citizenship’ to refer to participants’ status as British citizens sharing legal, social and political rights as formal members of the British nation-state. In effect, I employ the term ‘citizenship identity’ to denote respondents’ depiction of their nationality status as British citizens. As for ‘ethnic identity’, as I stipulated in Chapter Two, I rely on Brah’s (1996) notion that interconnecting concepts such as ethnicity and culture remain embedded within racialised discourses; I therefore emphasise that respondents’ definitions of themselves as, for instance, ‘Pakistani’ or ‘Asian’ may be reflective of identities which are ‘racialised’. As Brah (1993: 443) highlights, the need to deconstruct the racialised category ‘Muslim woman’ as ‘it has been constituted in British discourse’ is important as it helps us to understand South Asian women’s ‘personal and social identities’ which are informed by social, cultural and political constructs. Nevertheless, it is clear that as some participants interrogate this process of racialisation by

questioning the stereotypical connotations of terms such as 'Asian', others are ready to adopt these terms fully and therefore, participate in their own constructions of ethnic identity in British South Asian Muslim communities.

Navigating citizenship, ethnic and religious identities proves that Muslims in Britain are making conscious moves so as to construct multiple, or 'compound' (Dwyer, 2000: 475) identities in Britain. Within the context of multicultural politics in Britain, such agency from Muslims can be viewed as 'Muslim assertiveness', which emanates not from Islamic ideals but from contemporary European concepts of equality and egalitarianism (Modood, 2006: 46). Respondents make sense of their social identities in different ways, overcoming essentialised meanings of 'race', ethnicity and citizenship so as to produce 'new' constructions of Islamic identities. Based on the complexity and evolutionary nature of ethnic minority groups portrayed by previous studies, I consider whether it is important for respondents to maintain ethnic identity. For instance, does the maintenance of customary cultural customs such as adherence to clothing, language or food, as well as adherence to Islam, influence women's positions in how they view themselves and how their communities perceive them? Indeed, as Werbner (2004: 896) indicates, 'Diasporas cannot exist outside representation'; likewise, women's gender identities must be understood as firstly, lived experience and secondly, as how these identities are 'represented', hence perceived by others.

I develop my argument in two stages so as to analytically draw out Muslim women's strategies to contest and construct ideas of Muslimness within the larger context of citizenship, ethnic and racialised frameworks. Firstly, I concentrate on how respondents identify themselves and what terms they use to do so; respondents illustrate their definitions by reiterating the ways in which they affirm their identities. The analysis of how women identify themselves therefore comprises on one level, the formal terms they use to *express* who they are (for example 'British', 'Muslim', 'Asian') and on another level, how they *perform* who they are (their identities) through affirmation and actions encountered in daily experiences. More specifically, I focus on the strategies employed by respondents to affirm their identities while they struggle to manage inter-generational tensions and community pressure. The major intergenerational tension which emanates from my discussions relates to the dichotomy 'religion' versus 'culture', whereby participants actively contest the older generations' intertwining interpretations of Islam and South Asian culture so as to develop more individualistic versions of what it means to be Muslim in Britain. Such processes reflect the choices which women make so as to affirm their 'chosen' (individual) or 'imposed' (cultural legacy) identities. With social class, geographical mobility and rising educational levels, South Asian communities are evolving, becoming more 'complex and

heterogeneous' as younger generations explore new avenues and forge a new group identity, belonging neither to their parents' category nor to the majority's culture as they get influenced by the dominant culture (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008: 148). Educated Muslim women in my research are hence pushed to consider how they view themselves in terms of citizenship, ethnic and religious identities, and how they come to assess the importance these hold in their lives, within the broader context of British South Asian Muslimness. In so doing, I draw on the existing notions around hyphenated (hybrid) and multiple identities so as to illustrate the instability of identities, and the possibility of embracing more than one identity simultaneously, hence deconstructing the notion of identities as being fixed categories.

Secondly, I explore the importance of Islam in the lives of participants so as to evaluate the extent to which religious identity influences their daily experiences. Considerable research (Jacobson, 1997, Abbas, 2003, Akhtar, 2005, Robinson, 2005, Dwyer and Shah, 2009) has highlighted the centrality that Islam has in the lives of British South Asian Muslims. Research also suggests that Muslim women in the UK are embracing Islam in different ways; adopting clothing such as the hijab/jilbab, as well as reading and understanding the Qur'an, and learning about their religion are ways to maintain religious identity (Brown, 2006). Indeed, respondents also clearly profess a religious identity (Muslim identities) that helps bridge their intertwined ethnic and citizenship identities (South Asian and British), hence attributing huge significance to the term, and the notion, of being 'British Muslim'. I therefore highlight the emerging British Muslim identities in the UK, where participants portray their meanings of Islam in a context in which Muslim identities have been racialised and politicised post the terrorist attacks of September 11 and July 07. In the advent of these controversial events, Muslims resist stereotypical depictions of Islam so as to assert their own versions of Muslimness, hence supporting the argument that Muslim identities are not fixed categories. I illustrate the diversity in the manifestation of Islamic identities by firstly, analysing why the term 'British Muslim' is increasingly being used by young Muslims in the UK and secondly, by looking at respondents' perceptions and experiences of the hijab.

More importantly, through my analysis, I emphasise that processes of negotiations allow respondents to develop, construct and contest expressions of 'Muslimness' which enable them to manage Muslimness. This begs questions such as: what does it mean to be Muslim in Britain and what makes me Muslim in multicultural spaces where citizenship, ethnicity, 'race' and gender intersect? Such debates, as indicated by respondents, are commonly articulated and contested through clothing, where the visibility of the hijab on university campuses and workplaces becomes an area of contention and negotiation for

Muslim women in the UK. As Dwyer's (1999: 7) work on the construction and the articulation of alternative Muslim femininities and identities through the reworking of the meanings of dress has revealed, the veil, as a form of dress, has become a 'dominant signifier for Islam'. In my study, it is clear that active motives on the part of educated Muslim women to contest and construct ideals of Muslimness in Britain are leading them to engage within processes of negotiations of their identities. Indeed, Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 151) maintain that diasporic identities cannot remain 'uncontaminated' or 'essential' as change is inevitable. This point remains important to my study as it reflects the possibilities for identities to develop and evolve, thereby deconstructing the notion that identities are fixed; young Muslim women's negotiations of their social identities indicate the dynamic nature of identities and as such, demonstrate the potential for the assertion of new gender identities.

5.2 EXPRESSING WHO I AM

I start this section by looking at how participants define themselves. Firstly, I look at how they *express* (by definition) their identities. By 'express', I mean how respondents formally define themselves by using terms such as 'Asian', 'Muslim' or 'Pakistani'. In this analysis, I aim to find out whether respondents prioritise one identity over another. This demonstrates respondents' negotiations of identities in signifying their agency to decide which identity to embrace and which identity to reject. I also highlight the dynamic nature of identities as participants contest and construct ethnic and religious identities as they reflect on their sense of 'self'; this reveals the shifting nature of identities as respondents navigate their social contexts. Secondly, I discuss participants' feelings about how external perceptions from South Asians and Muslims, as well as non-South Asians and non-Muslims in Britain influence and determine women's own views on how they define themselves. More specifically, I focus on respondents' responses to what they feel remain 'stereotypes' and 'labels' of their social identities. This highlights the ways in which respondents evaluate their identities and develop new gender identities as they explore higher educational and work settings.

5.2.1 Processes of identification

Defining myself

Participants use a number of terms to formally define themselves. This is demonstrative of the fact that young women are actively thinking about how to define themselves as they use different terms, thereby reflecting the agency involved in shaping their decisions. More explicitly, the differences among them rate from identifying

themselves along citizenship (British), ethnic (Pakistani, Kashmiri, Bangladeshi, Gujarati, Indian) and religious (Muslim) lines. Women seem to manifest an array of identities whereby they are potentially able to make conscious decisions and choices to adopt individual identities which they think to be more important to them; this demonstrates the fluidity of subjective identities that young women employ to convey meanings as to how they view themselves, hence constructing and contesting new identities for themselves. As Werbner (2004) indicates, this is a voluntary process where young South Asian people combine different identities to produce diverse spheres of diasporic identities suiting situational contexts.

'The South Asian category, there's so many differences in that category and gender differences as well but I want to, like I do, recognise myself as British...some people would say Pakistani and I am a Pakistani but I also want to be known as British, British South Asian, again these categories they're way too broad, it's like the notion of black, in the 1990s...there was the term black associated with anybody who was Asian and African Caribbean and we were all put under the same umbrella, nowadays, it's fused, through music and so on' (Sonia).

A salient point is evident from my discussion with Sonia; her expressions of identity are contextualised within broader political and racialised discourses which have dominated the politics of ethnicity in the UK. Sonia is the only participant to express a politicised view of South Asian identities; other participants express more individual and personal notions of being 'South Asian' in Britain. Sonia, who recognises the shifts that have occurred in discourses of South Asian identities in Britain, suggests that British South Asian identities come with variations that have been essentialised, the same way in which Black identities were stereotyped in the 1990s. Her response, as opposed to other participants, is reflective of the fact that her educational background influences her perceptions and alters her mindset about multicultural politics in the UK; her Master's degree in Sociology, focussing on South Asian identities in Britain, equips her with different analytical tools to comprehend how identities are differentiated or fused through racialised discourses. Here, Sonia explains that the term 'black', historically, has hindered the recognition of individual identities.

This political perspective tallies with Modood's (2006: 42) argument, which explains that through the black identity movement, questions about difference and how white society should make space for the expression of non-white identities led to South Asians in Britain to adopt a 'plural ethnic assertiveness', hence encouraging the manifestation of public pluralist identities. Likewise, Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 149) use the term 'hybridised Asianess' to suggest that following the influx of black culture (hip hop/rap music) and concepts such as 'black pride', South Asians in Britain have similarly generated concepts of British South Asianess through specific types of music (western

dance/ bhangra) that help to contain meanings of Asianess, 'symbolically representing a hybrid of both cultures'. This point has similarly been raised by Sonia, who identifies fusion of identities through popular culture (music).

In the opening section of my interviews, I asked respondents how they 'define' themselves so as to get a general overview of how they choose to *express* their 'sense of self', and why they believe that the terms they use are appropriate. Previous research (Dwyer, 2000; Ahmad *et al.*, 2003; Afshar *et al.*, 2005) has also shown that young South Asians profess hyphenated, hybrid or multiple identities. Indeed, the second generation of South Asian migrants in Britain articulate distinctive values by acknowledging Britain as their home (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008), hence participating in the notion that celebrates 'cultures of hybridity', (Gilroy, 1993) blending East and West. There has been considerable research on how women of British South Asian ethnic minorities navigate between ethnic and citizenship identities to define themselves. Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 143), drawing on Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'imagined communities', and focusing on citizenship rights and identity discourses, suggest that it is important to 'rethink citizenship from the perspective of collective identity conceptualised as an imaginary community' when assessing South Asian communities in Britain. As they point out, issues around citizenship must be understood as a 'significant dimension of hybridised ethnic identities' (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008: 145). This notion is supported by my study as it is evident that my respondents also affix citizenship identity to other social identities such as ethnic or religious identity; in fact, the large majority of participants affix 'British' to either ethnic or religious identity.

Hyphenated (hybrid) identities

Most respondents express themselves by using hyphenated identities. Eleven women call themselves 'British Muslim', whereby ethnic identity for these respondents is not prioritised over Islamic and citizenship identities. However, one participant suggests that she prefers the term 'Muslim British' instead. Seven respondents identify themselves as 'British Pakistani', hence hyphenating their citizenship and ethnic backgrounds. Only three respondents determine their identities using ethnicity, alternating between 'British Asian' and 'British South Asian'. Three respondents view themselves merely along ethnic origin - 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi', while only two identify solely as 'British'. Three respondents manifest complex and multiple identities, such as 'British Asian Muslim'. Out of this research sample, only one young woman professed her identity as being simply 'Muslim':

'I prefer to just call myself Muslim because it's simpler...I wouldn't say to other people that I'm British and by the way a person talks you can know whether they're

British. Pakistani, I don't like telling people that I am cause there's so much rubbish associated with the culture...it's the culture that Pakistanis impose on others' (Aisha).

As I argue later on in this chapter, religious identity is a prominent facet of women's definitions of their 'sense of self'. Here, Aisha reveals that her Muslimness provides her with enough scope to encompass other aspects of her identity; in effect, she expresses her inability to embrace 'Pakistani culture' and the prioritising of her Muslim identity aids in articulating a more comfortable aspect of herself, in her adherence to Islam. In deciding to deny aspects such as 'British' and 'Pakistani', Aisha finds an easy solution to the problem of 'choosing' or 'picking' an identity over another. Indeed, participants claim that it is extremely hard to dissociate the various strands of their social identities. In my research, just two respondents maintain that they could literally pick one identity over another when asked whether they could prioritise between their citizenship, ethnic and religious identities. As the quote below echoes, negotiating identities by epitomising the joint realities of being 'all of them' positions women within a framework where identities cannot be viewed as fixed, but fluid:

'When people come up to me and say... what are you? I can get quite defensive about that as not only am I a private person ...I find it strange that people who don't know me just out of the blue... I tend to say well...what do you mean? Do you mean where I was born? My background? Or where my parents are from? To be honest, I'd say I'm all of them. I'm Asian, I'm British, I'm Muslim and I'm Gujarati' (Alia).

For Hanah, 'being comfortable' in her identity is what matters to her; categorising her 'sense of self' is not helpful and remains unnecessary:

'I've embraced my culture a lot more now...when you're young, you want to be British...peer pressure...to be told in my early 20s 'oh you don't look like an Asian' or Pakistani, I'd be like 'thank you' and now I actually feel like no, I'm proud to be who I am because that's part of me but I'm very comfortable because I don't like to be put in a box, I like to be awkward hence 'other'' (Hanah).

Hanah's awareness to recognise a shift in how she positions herself now, as opposed to succumbing to 'peer pressure' which previously encouraged her to reject her 'religion' and 'culture', highlights the possibilities for identities to be re-worked in a more positive light as women gain educational and work experiences. Hanah's reflection demonstrates that women's perceptions of who they are evolve by noting the transitions they go through as they grow older. Such progress in understandings leads Hanah to become reluctant to accept the notion of fixed categories as she utters her refusal to 'be put in a box'. While some women would prioritise religious identity over ethnic identity, others would link citizenship and religious identity. This process of identification therefore reveals that participants project carefully articulated identities. Respondents portray the ambivalence and also the

complexities of having to 'deal' with multiple aspects of their identities. These mark the tensions that arise when racialised discourses, seen through 'ethnicity', impact on how young women are perceived, and consequently, on how they define themselves. For instance, although Sadia suggests that she would pick 'British' to define herself, she reflects on the difficulty of adhering solely to being British and interestingly, comments on the fact that although she was brought up in a Pakistani culture in England, her upbringing does not *make* her Pakistani:

'British... always...no doubt about that...but it's difficult to say...like Pakistani, we've never lived there except when we go back on holidays and so on, our parents are from there but we go there, we're treated as foreigners, like you're not from here... although we've been brought up in like a Pakistani culture, we are not Pakistani ourselves we are British born Muslims of Pakistani descent if that makes sense' (Sadia).

I here reflect specifically on Sadia's perspective on 'belonging' to emphasise the articulation of her identities; she suggests that her cultural heritage is not perceived by Pakistani nationals as authentic as she is treated 'like foreigners'. Nevertheless, her 'British' identity is infused by her Pakistani upbringing, which also remits into question her 'Britishness'.

'No, not one will take precedence over the other...If someone is being completely accepting of both my backgrounds, then that's fine. I'll say they're equal, British, Indian, Pakistani and Muslim...multiple and I cannot tell you that I'm one more than the other' (Sabina, of Pakistani and Indian heritage).

'It's not a problem but it's about being in between and it's not even conscious like I'm fine with it but I'm all of them and I can't pick one, I think that's the hardest thing for me' (Rashida).

Likewise, Sabina and Rashida find it hard to choose among their multiple identities. For Sabina, they are all 'equal' while for Rashida, being 'all of them' is natural as she does not consciously think that she finds herself in between cultures. Rashida does not, in effect, feel the need to negotiate identities so as to prioritise one identity over another. Here, I highlight the differences I encountered among participants in the ways in which they manage Muslimness through their negotiations of, for instance, clothing. For some respondents, clothing becomes a visual illustration of one's identity and comes to define and direct the ways in which they engage into negotiating identities. As an example, Nazia's quote demonstrates how individuality and subjectivity influence the *expression* of identities through clothing:

'I'm British and I'm religious, like I wear jeans and tops with the hijab as I am both. But I don't think I would choose one over the other, the two are interchangeable, I couldn't live without one or the other, I couldn't be entirely British because it would go against my rules of being Muslim and I couldn't live being completely Muslim because it would be difficult, a lot of things come from my

British culture, the two are mixed and I could never separate the two, ever...I live my religion, but I couldn't follow it entirely because it's so hard to follow, I mean according to Islamic values, I shouldn't be too familiar with boys but it's not possible here' (Nazia).

Nazia wears 'jeans and tops with the hijab'; she describes this style as being 'both'. It is her way of visually saying that she is both Muslim and British. For her, it is impossible to choose between her British and Muslim identity. Nevertheless, navigation encompasses a framework for contradiction, which young women like Nazia epitomise; 'British culture' and 'Islamic values' may contradict each other, thereby resulting into the realisation that adaptation to contextual environments remains important if one wants to embrace 'both'.

This tension is further exemplified through gender relationships that women have to cope with as they explore educational or work spaces. More specifically, Nazia, a practising Muslim, is faced with contradicting attitudes with respect to Muslim codes prohibiting the casual inter-mingling of sexes, which, in the British context, is normalised. Yet, Nazia finds ways to adapt to situations. Here, Nazia mentions that geographical location influences how one chooses to embrace identities; processes of identification are therefore closely interlinked to geographical context:

'If I was living in a Muslim country that would be the norm and you accept that but you have to change in a different society, people say 'you are who you are and you shouldn't change' but no, you have to, because you are in different surroundings, different society and you have to mingle into that society, not think that you have rules and regulations and then stamp your foot and think 'this is how I'm going to be because my religion makes me an individual' You live in a society where you study and work with other people and you have to adapt with what's around you and this is what makes me who I am' (Nazia).

For Nazia, 'British culture' cannot and should not be sidelined so that an individual can fully embrace what he or she thinks Islam prescribes. In essence, choice remains a significant aspect on women's agendas, where Nazia manages her Muslim identity by exercising agency in the ways in which they understand the meanings of Islam within their social contexts.

Having looked broadly at the complexities involved in defining, hence expressing one's identity, I extend this discussion further by concentrating on women's adoption of hyphenated (or hybrid) identities. I do so because the majority of respondents have expressed their identities using hyphenated terms, where ethnic and citizenship identities remain deeply embedded within racialised discourses on 'Asianess' and 'Britishness':

'I just see myself as a young British South Asian. And it's hard sometimes because there are certain things that Western society does, and that I don't do, but there are a lot of things that I do...it's the same with the Asian side, there are some things that

I don't believe in and others I do...so sometimes it's a bit like 'Oh where do I fit? Am I here? Am I there?' But now I've just come to think of it as...like I've got my own identity, I've got my views and traditions from my Asian community and also from Western society, so I've got an individual identity... I'm not going to say I'm Western or completely South Asian but a mixture of both' (Saeema).

Respondents provide reasons why they use certain terms such as 'British Pakistani', 'British Asian' or 'South Asian', all hybridised terms, to identify themselves. Their citizenship status as British is almost always juxtaposed to an ethnic or religious identity; in effect, even though they see themselves as 'British', ethnic (for example 'Pakistani') or religious (for example 'Muslim') is added to the prefix 'British'. However, it is also possible for them to fluctuate between terms and notions as perceptions and meanings about their identities change. Constructing personal identities and versions of Britishness and Asianess lead women to find a space where they are able to express 'individual' identities:

'My little sister came from Pakistan, she was born there and she came with this culture, two of my sisters were born in Pakistan and they brought the culture with them, one was six when she came and she says this is how we do it in Pakistan and I say no! We have different nationalities... I was born here and she grew up there with my auntie and she says she's British Pakistani straight but my cousin who comes from Pakistan will say 'I'm British and' she doesn't even have a British passport and that's just bizarre' (Aisha).

Aisha draws on the differences that erupt when siblings have 'different nationalities', hence different versions of citizenship identity. Her two sisters came to England from Pakistan and will always define themselves as 'British Pakistani', as opposed to a cousin, who does not have a British passport, but feels confident to define herself as British. As Aisha defines how 'bizarre' these experiences can be, she subtly highlights the fluidity, and even, the ease with which members of her family can interchangeably utilise such terms, irrespective of place of birth and country of origin. This indicates how processes of identification remain subjective as women choose to articulate their identities in their individual ways.

Sabina is of mixed ethnic heritage; her father is Indian and her mother is Pakistani. Sabina was born in Britain and married someone of Pakistani origin. Throughout our discussion, she has expressed her frustration at the fact that her 'Indian' identity is considerably brushed aside by her husband's family:

'I'd say that probably I would be Indian more than Pakistani because I get annoyed with people who are Pakistani. It's like 'Oh I thought you were Hindu', they can't believe it my father-in-law has been saying, since I got married that whenever we go we have to get your Pakistani passport made...I go like 'I'm not really Pakistani', what's the point? I've got a British passport...why bother? It really, really bothers me...my husband's family...they want me to forget I'm half Indian...that's why I just say Asian cause I am both Pakistani and Indian...my parents-in-law's parents are 100% Indian, so they are 100% Indian as well although they may have been born on Pakistani soil, they have Indian heritage as

well, there is nothing to be ashamed of about it' (Sabina, of Pakistani and Indian origin).

I here want to suggest that although identities appear to be fluid, they can also be competing and hence, generate tensions for individuals. Indeed, for respondents of mixed descent like Sabina, the use of hyphenated identities is, not surprisingly, particularly important. For this reason, Sabina prefers to use 'British Asian'. It is evident that her citizenship identity is of utmost importance to her, while the term 'Asian' helps her manage the complexities of being of mixed ethnic heritage. A link between ethnicity and religion can also be drawn as in being of Indian origin, Sabina reflects on the fact that she is automatically labelled as 'Hindu' instead of Muslim, by the Pakistani community; in effect, being Pakistani is then often equated with being Muslim in British South Asian Muslim communities.

'When people say 'What are you?' and I say 'Pakistani' and I think the only time I started referring to 'South Asian' was when I went to uni and I did my own research, that's when my perceptions changed and I think that's why I'm saying 'South Asian' now because before that I'd always used 'British Pakistani'...it makes more sense as people know I am British when I speak right' (Saeema).

Saeema, since going to university and studying multicultural identities in the UK as part of her course, reiterates that using 'South Asian' became more appropriate in a context where people of diverse cultures and nationality meet and mix (university). By using the term 'South Asian' instead of 'British Pakistani', Saeema highlights not her ethnic background (Pakistani) but her cultural heritage (South Asian). Indeed, she assumes that her 'Britishness' is evident when she speaks English with a northern accent. In the discussion below, I further elaborate on notions of 'Britishness', as reiterated by respondents.

Meanings of 'Britishness'

Bushra, on her part, attempts to assume a position within racialised discourses which essentialise Britishness as whiteness. She unequivocally believes that her 'Asianess', expressed through her ethnic origin, does not make her 'just' British:

'I always say Asian! But if you have to tick boxes, then I tick British Indian (Laugh)...you don't hear that actually...if it's non-specific then it's British Asian...yes I'm both. I'm definitely not only Asian cause I've never lived there and my passport is not Asian and I have to get a visa to go back there...so the link I have got is through my parents who are Asians but my passport is British so I am British, but I guess ethnicity always comes into it. I'm not white Caucasian British so yeah, probably British Asian...I am British but I'm not White, not English...I think Americans have a better concept of that, they're all Americans, they don't have this' (Bushra).

In this discussion I stress how inclusionary and exclusionary political discourses on ethnic minorities, which root ethnic origin as a premise for identification, results in divisive

frameworks which encourage the notion of fixed categories. This ultimately affects women in how they define themselves when thinking about citizenship identity. Bushra differentiates the notions of 'Britishness' from 'Americaness'. Indeed, Bagguley and Hussain (2008), in considering 'Americaness' as reference, reflect on the fact that Americans understand ethnic identity within the broader concept of national identity, as opposed to Britons, who affix 'whiteness' to Britishness. The recognition of racism therefore affects young women's sense of identity as their feelings of belonging are heavily influenced by racialised and politicised discourses around citizenship, inclusion and exclusion. Raising questions about citizenship and definitions of Englishness and Britishness, Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 146) note that national identity is being perceived as a 'white ethnic' unified group by the far right, whereby 'Englishness continues to reproduce blackness as it's other'; 'Britishness constitutes white ethnic groups such as the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish who do not share similar language or culture'.

This arguably is what frames Bushra's notion of 'Britishness', although she explains the differences between Britishness with Englishness, and ultimately, citizenship with ethnicity. Bushra, born in England, a non-white and therefore excluded from 'Englishness' equates 'whiteness' with 'Britishness'. Dwyer (2000: 476) argues that 'Britishness' is often synonymous with an essentialised construction of 'Englishness', which is subtly related to 'whiteness'. Bushra's 'Asianess' cannot account for her being accepted as inherently 'British' and hence, feels the need to hyphenate 'Asian' to 'British'. For that reason, she expresses the difficulty in identifying herself solely as 'British', although she is officially a British citizen by law. As Cesarani (1996, quoted in Bagguley and Hussain, 2008: 146) claims, 'Britishness is a political construct while Englishness is a cultural concept that racialises the politics of citizenship'. Indeed, Shazia explains:

'You're not white so...even if you see a white Muslim sometimes and they have a headscarf on, somebody would shout 'Paki' to her...I was born in Britain....bloody hell...even some of the people of Middle Eastern origin do look Asian, my friend from Oman she looks Asian and people would yell 'Paki! Asian-Paki'...you're Asian, you're Bengali or whatever, and you're all the same. If you're black you're just Negro...but you're not seen as British' (Shazia).

From this, I emphasise how processes of identification remain embedded in cultural racism governed by stereotypical depictions of 'Asianess'. Here, Shazia talks about the impossibility of using the term 'British' due to racialised stereotyping. Indeed, making an interesting link between citizenship, Islam and racialised identities, she suggests that assumptions about non-Britishness are always defined through non-whiteness, just like Muslimness (here marked by the headscarf) is never associated with whiteness but with Asianess.

Yasmin reinforces this argument; in being from a 'non-white background', her identity as 'British' is not given full approval. However, the way she defines herself changed with her trip to Pakistan, where the cultural differences encountered during her stay led to a recognition and acknowledgment of her citizenship identity, with which she finds herself 'comfortable' with:

'I never really thought of myself as British until I went abroad and realised that I don't fit in anywhere else...I feel more at home here like when we were growing up, always thought of ourselves as Pakistanis or Kashmiris but when we went there, we didn't fit in at all and I was 14 so I feel more comfortable with my British identity than anything else but I do put British Kashmiri and the reasons they put down these terms, it's discrimination and I know that I am disadvantaged in being from a non-white background so I put British Kashmiri but I do think of myself as a British more than anything' (Yasmin).

Furthermore, Yasmin has gone beyond 'Pakistani' in the way that she defines her ethnic identity. She is now readier to embrace a more specific ethnic affiliation, which is 'Kashmiri'. Her quote suggests that it is a self-conscious political act to re-evaluate the way in which she identifies herself in order to challenge the discrimination she experiences. For ethnic communities, religious or cultural allegiances contribute in defining their communities as ethnic minorities. For these communities, 'citizenship identity' will therefore always work in conjunction with how national identity is perceived by communities themselves (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008: 147). Indeed, Bagguley and Hussain (2008) suggest that young South Asians in the UK generate the idea of 'multiple identities' (British/Pakistani/Muslim), thereby engaging with their own definitions of citizenship.

For instance, participants demonstrate links between culture (South Asian) and citizenship (British), whereby individually negotiating between these two concepts determines how respondents perceive themselves. For example, Rashida reflects on her experiences at university, which acts as a site for the contestation of identities; in contesting identities, respondents encounter the possibilities of shifting identities over time and space. This is a key point in this analysis of Muslim women's identities as it illustrates how university experiences are contributing to respondents' evolving gender identities:

'I would never have thought of these things before like those experiences and people ask you questions and it's like, it makes you think actually, like do I not look it (South Asian)? Or you know, I was asked once 'are you Persian?' and I was like 'what?' and all this makes you think and you have cases of 'are you British?' It makes you think because I look Pakistani and at the same time you're here and these two identities just overlap, I'm both' (Rashida).

Talking about her physical appearance, Rashida questions the assumptions that in being non-white, people would automatically know that she is 'Pakistani' and hence, South Asian. Here, Rashida feels that her citizenship and ethnic identities overlap when her identities are

publicly scrutinised, whereby demonstrating that she is 'both' remains important to her. Ultimately, Rashida is unconsciously participating in the racialisation of her identities by reading her ethnicity 'from the body'- in asking the question 'do I not look it?', Rashida self-ascribes a 'South Asian' or 'Pakistani' identity to her body and being.

'British Pakistani...I do use it, that's where my grandparents came from and my mum and whenever we talk about back home, we talk about Pakistan, like you never say back home England, you call back home Pakistan and for some reason that's what you do...but I was born here' (Nadia).

In using 'British Pakistani', Nadia maintains the balance of acknowledging her citizenship as well as her ethnic and cultural heritage. Indeed, 'home' in Nadia's context is always Pakistan and never England, although her parents and grandparents live in England. Identity is therefore evoked through notions and meanings of home, whereby geographical distance does not hinder young women from constructing and articulating ethnic and national identities of their grandparents' and parents' generations. This analysis is supported by previous research (Afshar, 1989), who has also demonstrated the 'mythical haven' evoked through notions of the homeland by South Asian migrants. Abida agrees:

'I would say I'm a Pakistani. That's my identity, even though I was born in Britain. I'm not ashamed of it and I will say I'm a Pakistani because it is the homeland, but I can't say I'm a British for some reason...I go out, I explore the shopping, I wear jeans...I do everything as is done in this country, education... I speak with a Northern accent but when I go home I live the life with my parents, their culture, their ways, and I feel in myself...being a bit more British with my accent, but why I say I'm Pakistani is because I feel that the way I do it is more like a Pakistani person' (Abida).

Although born and bred in the UK, Abida maintains that she is unable to say that she is 'British'. Her insight into her definition of 'British' is not through the legal/civic rights she obtains as a British citizen, or the status she gains from being a British national, but more through language and her 'accent'. Clearly, her way of life 'at home' (cultural customs in the private sphere) takes priority over her citizenship status, whereby her citizenship identity is sidelined; the 'British' culture for Abida resumes itself to education, shopping and eating out, activities carried out in public spheres. However, in defining who she is, her allegiance remains predominantly linked to her parents' Pakistani cultural heritage, their national culture, which Abida adopts as her own.

Such diverging opinions on definitions of what it means to be 'British' for young Muslim women of South Asian origin have exposed not only the fluid nature of evolving identities but also the controversies and tensions which emanate from such processes of active negotiations. I believe that this debate has also thrown light on women's *expressions*

of identities, through inclusionary and exclusionary racialised discourses. As Alia illustrates:

'I am British but not totally, I am not white, like English' (Alia).

This concept adopts and encourages the biased and racialised equation of British is equal to English, which is in turn, epitomised through whiteness. As respondents navigate these notions, they raise discussions about what it means to be 'Muslim', 'South Asian' and 'British'. In contextualising their debates within the wider discourses of multiculturalism and national belonging, respondents demonstrate that their negotiations are having an impact on the ways in which they think, and project their identities. This section has revealed the multiple ways in which respondents choose to define themselves. It has demonstrated that whilst some prefer to prioritise citizenship and ethnic identities (for example British Pakistani), others choose to affix citizenship with religious identity (British Muslim). Indeed, participants also manifest other options by using terms such as 'British South Asian'. Women's carefully articulated and contextualised identities reflect their agency in manifesting their identities. Nevertheless, their negotiations occur within racialised discourses of South Asian Muslim identities in Britain; what constitutes Britishness, South Asianess and Muslimness for respondents influences how and why they define themselves as they do. Their perceptions are leading them to formulate new gender identities as they navigate educational and work settings. In the next part of this analysis, I highlight the contours of such debates by reviewing how participants think that they are perceived by non-South Asians and non-Muslims in Britain so as to determine how external perceptions impact on participants' views of their identities. As they evaluate external perceptions of identities, young women engage with discourses about gendered identities, leading them to question, contest, and construct new identities.

5.2.2 Labels and stereotypes

During the interviews, respondents suggested that external perceptions contribute significantly to how they view themselves. In particular, they claim that public perceptions rest upon how non-Asians and non-Muslims understand, accept or critique notions of being British, South Asian or Muslim in multicultural Britain. From women's responses, 'labelling' and 'stereotyping' of their identities seem evident. These lead them to experience different reactions in various social contexts, hence participating in constructing Muslim women's gendered identities within the broader context of British society. As Bushra states:

'At university, everyone is like 'who are you? Where are you from?' So much of that, like 'oh you're Indian Muslim, so you must be Gujarati', and I'm like 'no', I'm just Indian Muslim, I'm not part of anything in India, from Bombay, like when

you're Muslim, they want to know what sect and so on, a lot of that happening at university...labelling' (Bushra).

Bushra, in stressing how 'university' becomes a significant social space where contestations occur, expresses her frustration about assumptions that equate religion to ethnicity, whereby being 'Indian Muslim' does not necessarily mean that she is of Gujarati origin. Bushra's frustration indicates not a denial of ethnic identity but a resistance to stereotypical labelling. Indeed, essentialist notions of women's ethnic and Muslim identities contribute to 'labels', hence developing fixed notions of women's social identities. Nevertheless, Haleema acknowledges the diversity of views from non-Asian and non-Muslim groups, highlighting the variations in the ways people think about their British identities:

'I have encountered different types of non-Asian and non-Muslim people and they all behave in a different way, some of them would be fine talking to me but some of them are unsure as of how to talk to me. In Britain, and the western world, the media has such a strong hold on everything and a lot of people get influenced by the media and then coming back to education again, I find the more educated people behave differently towards me cause they'll be more tolerant... people who are not educated will be more influenced by the media because they haven't got that scope on things so that's why education is so important' (Haleema).

The media's role in constructing Asianess and Muslimness, as well as educational levels, influence people's perceptions of South Asian identities in Britain; recognising and accepting difference remains an issue whereby education encourages diversity in how multiple identities are understood, articulated and manifested. The degree to which people 'mix' with those from ethnic minorities also contribute to their notions of nationality and citizenship, hence shaping ideas and notions of Britishness. Racialised, ethnic and religious affiliations are viewed as manifestations that prevent British society from potentially regarding British born Muslims of South Asian descent as fully British:

'Perceptions depend on people's political beliefs, their religious belief and their affections towards Muslims depends on individuals' thinking, if they're very liberal about their views, they're going to accept everyone on the base that they are humans just like them but if somebody is patriotic then they'll probably be a little fiery, like be protective and self-centred about their identity and they would use the term 'pure blood' so pure British, like white' (Fatimah).

Fatimah, who thinks that this question is also debatable, suggests that a stronger sense of nationality on people's part may influence their reactions and beliefs that Muslim women of South Asian origin are British; not being considered 'of pure blood', or viewed as 'immigrants', will impact on how perceptions are constructed and affirmed, further reinforcing this concept of 'othering'. Fatimah maintains that the more 'liberal' they are, the easier it is for people to accept others on the basis of humanity, as opposed to identities defined through racialised, ethnic or religious principles. More specifically, research

participants denounce how language (accent), skin colour and dress remain significant identity markers in framing difference within racialised boundaries that women socially experience:

‘When they speak to me, they probably assume that I’m British and whether they feel I belong here, that’s a totally different matter, I’m judged that’s for sure, my culture says it all’ (Faiza).

Faiza describes a discourse of marginalisation which is based on both ‘assumption’ about belonging (from external perception based on accent) and having the right to claim a space of ‘belonging’ (having the right to belong). This suggests that to gain full acceptance as ‘British’ is thorny as her ‘culture’ demarcates her as different, hence defining her as ‘other’; her citizenship identity is brought into question as Faiza expresses her awareness of being ‘judged’ by people of non-South Asian backgrounds. If cultural identity marks the differential boundaries of who ‘belongs’ and who ‘does not’ for Faiza, for Nazia, racialised identity and the dichotomy white versus non-white is ultimately what defines her as ‘other’ and hence, not ‘British’:

‘At the end of the day, I have dark skin, I don’t have white skin...but I was born here’ (Nazia).

Shabana raises issues about her ‘nationality’ and suggests that context determines how identities are assessed and perceived:

‘If I don’t agree with something in Pakistan, I can stand up and say this is wrong and nobody will say anything but if I say something here, first thing that’s going to come up here is my nationality, no one thinks that I can think because of my nationality...it’s easy for me to say I am Pakistani but if you can’t deal with it, that’s your problem because I am British, but I am still Pakistani and wherever I go, people at work for example, they don’t refer to me as ‘that girl’ but as ‘that Asian girl’...it’s who I am, my skin colour is different and it’s easy for others to say ‘that Asian girl’, it’s just a word but it means ‘she’s not British’ when I say I’m Pakistani it makes my life a lot easier as white people are not accepting me, I am Pakistani and I am not trying to be like them’ (Shabana).

Shabana’s dual allegiances to being Pakistani and British are not acknowledged as her Asianess sets her apart from British ‘white’ society. Denouncing prejudices, she highlights that she is labelled ‘the Asian girl’ by non-South Asians in Britain, and hence, is not seen as being fully capable of embracing British values due to her Pakistani heritage. From respondents’ views reiterated in this section, it is clear that the external perceptions of their identities, generated through ‘labels’ and ‘stereotypes’ at university or work, demonstrate the ways in which young women are engaging with the wider discourses around South Asianess and Muslimness in Britain. As they navigate meanings of South Asianness, Muslimness and Britishness, respondents rework their understandings of identities so as to

formulate new ones. In the following section, I extend this theme of 'labelling' and 'stereotyping' by focussing on dress codes; I discuss how the aspect of dressing acts as a code contributing to the process of labelling and stereotyping of British South Asian identities within spaces such as education and work.

5.2.3 Dress code: a marker of identity

In this section, I focus on how dress codes, in spaces such as university and work, help to signify respondents' identities. Indeed, questions such as 'does it matter what I wear?' raise debates about the extent to which clothing embodies notions of ascribed identities. Here, I reflect on how dress codes are being re-negotiated by young women as they navigate new spaces of university and work. This analysis, in effect, further demonstrates how young Muslim women negotiate their social contexts at university and work so as to construct and assert new gender identities. Indeed, all participants in this study suggest that clothing aids in signifying ethnic identities:

'I think it's clothing more than anything else that makes you bring out the culture, if anything it's a label' (Rashida).

'Once I start speaking they know but more the way I dress and look, that's why they see me as British and not Pakistani' (Sanaa).

'They always see me as British...but I wear salwar kameez and I speak in a northern accent....so they know, but what they see first is the outfit' (Rahila).

These examples demonstrate that participants recognise dress codes not only as an important facet marking their identities but also as contributing to the labelling of their ethnic identities. For instance, for Sanaa, her Britishness is not epitomised through her 'accent' but through her dress style (jeans, dress and tops); in wearing jeans, Sanaa maintains that she is not viewed as 'Pakistani'. However, unlike Sanaa, Rahila is convinced that her physical appearance does not matter, as opposed to others, who perceive dress to be a significant marker of difference influencing people's notions of Britishness. Rahila establishes the fact that she is British and is convinced that due to her accent, she is regarded as British, despite her Pakistani outfit (salwar kameez).

Participants also reiterate how religious identity, perceived through the use of the hijab or jilbab, influences notions about their 'Britishness'. As Nazia and Mushira explain:

'I was born here but I think it's more prominent with me because I wear the hijab, and it's such a big part of my identity, I may be British or Pakistani but it doesn't matter, cause I am Muslim, cause my hijab is so obvious, that it represents my religion before anything, so I don't think they really would say that I'm not British but the question is 'she's Muslim as she wears the hijab', and it's being more Muslim than British Pakistani' (Nazia).

'No...I think if I wasn't wearing the headscarf they would see me as British and I don't know why I think this but they don't' (Mushirah).

Although her Muslim identity remains the primary marker for Nazia, the pertinent comment she makes is in wearing the hijab, she reveals that her Muslimness takes precedence over her citizenship identity; her hijab symbolises that she *is* Muslim and this influences how she is perceived, and the degrees of importance which she attributes to her religious, ethnic and citizenship identities. As for Mushirah, she categorically utters that her hijab is the reason why she is not considered 'British'.

For Saeema, assumptions about her gendered and racialised identity as 'the Asian girl' become the medium where people assess her identity and subjectivity:

'You're not British, you're Asian...the Asian girl...I think they perceive me with like no headscarf, western clothes, educated, and they, like white blokes think 'oh she's like that' and they could make you do whatever they want you to do, like you're available and you're going to go out and have sex, like you're loose' (Saeema).

Recounting her experiences with 'white' men, Saeema maintains that Asian girls are categorised within groups where clothing ('headscarves' and 'western clothes') will differentiate how they are perceived by the public. Indeed, their gendered modes of behaviour are assessed through the lifestyle they choose to adopt. For them, an Asian girl wearing jeans and no headscarf signals that she is 'available'. The stereotype is such that Asian girls who adopt a more 'British' lifestyle of going out in 'western clothes', albeit with limitations (Saeema does not drink and covers her legs), suggests that she is regarded as being 'loose' by non-South Asian men. From this, her individuality and position as a British South Asian Muslim woman is essentialised and depicted as non-South Asian due to the non-traditional look she presents.

Abida strengthens this argument when she recounts that public perceptions change as soon as she started, out of choice, to wear the hijab:

'I started wearing the hijab...you start becoming more paranoid about the way you look when you wear a scarf...because of the way people see you, they change...as a Muslim, from a non-Muslim to a Muslim....then they start asking why is she wearing a scarf? All of a sudden, all the prejudice that you get...the typical 'she's probably wearing it because of her parents' (Abida).

In fact, she describes her experience as 'paranoia', whereby prejudice governs assumptions that Abida, as an Asian girl, succumbed to parental pressure to wear the hijab. Indeed, her Muslimness is obvious through the adoption of a dress code associated with Islam; she immediately turns from 'a non-Muslim to a Muslim' as she adopts the scarf. Clothing therefore affects how people perceive respondents' identities. The British versus Asian dress style dichotomy is reiterated, whereby dress codes mark, label and define one's identity as

British or non-British, hence as Asian and Muslim. Yet, Aisha, who wears the hijab and the jilbab, does not agree with Mushirah's Saeema's and Abida's views that dress 'excludes' them from being 'British':

'People here are very accepting mashallah, very good response from non-Muslims cause I wear the jilbab and I work in retail, in Next and they're really good. They see me as being British even with the jilbab. They accept the jilbab and even non-Muslims were telling me that it looks nice and that I dress modestly and that they just went into Primark and saw that girl trying revealing jeans on and it was absolutely hideous and people are wearing the hijab more, even the jilbab so people are getting used to seeing it' (Aisha).

Alternatively, Aisha claims that her jilbab does not prevent members of the public from acknowledging her as British. On the contrary, she is complimented on her style of dress, which she adopts at the workplace. Interestingly, Aisha thinks that the jilbab is not negatively viewed by non-Muslims as a marker of 'difference' but as a garment signifying the Islamic ethos of being 'modest'. This underlines a religious (Islamic) interpretation instead of a political (difference/ 'other') interpretation on the part of non-Muslims. For Aisha, non-Muslims' attitudes towards her dress code appear to be more inclusionary than exclusionary. In effect, Aisha does not feel that she is being 'labelled' or 'stereotyped' through her choice of dress codes.

Dwyer's (1999: 5-26) study on the role of clothing and its effects on Muslim women's identities reflect the 'Asian/English' dichotomy whereby, depending on context, 'Asian clothes' have associations with 'tradition' and 'ethnic culture' while 'English clothes' are used as signifiers for 'Westernisation' and 'modernity'. My respondents portray similar understandings of dress codes, where dress styles inform women's bodies through oppositional identities, which are reflective of 'ethnic' versus 'Western' ideals:

'I go home, I put on Asian clothes and then I become Asian, once I saw a friend in Oldham town, not at uni, and I had a salwar kameez on and she jeans on and I was like 'why didn't you tell me you're wearing jeans?' And I went really quiet, like I lost my confidence because it wasn't right, it wasn't the right outfit, it was not like western...the Asian girls, they wear Asian clothes not English clothes but she turned up in jeans and I felt that she was better than me or more confident and I went quiet and shy, I just felt awkward because the clothes are wrong, like Pakistani, and that's weird' (Sanaa).

For instance, Sanaa exemplifies how her identities are lived through clothing but simultaneously, clash with each other. Not having the right dress code on to suit particular contexts can lead to embarrassment and confusion. Here, Sanaa lost confidence and face in front of a friend who wore jeans, immediately feeling conscious that she was 'Asian' (shy and quiet) when she could have worn jeans and depict a 'western' (confident) image of herself; place and space therefore influence respondents' positions as to how they negotiate

being ‘western’ and ‘Pakistani’. Indeed, Sanaa’s words demonstrate the extent to which dress codes inform respondents’ ‘sense of self’; dress becomes the marker of participants’ identities as they construct the meanings of their social realities. As young women reiterate their feelings about the ways in which dress codes (salwar kameez, hijab or jilbab) aid to attribute ‘stereotypical’ notions around their ethnic, religious or citizenship identities, they also demonstrate their awareness in how and why such labelling of their identities take place. Indeed, their encounters at university and work lead them to question and re-negotiate their use of clothing. Clothing is not therefore merely reduced to ‘clothes’ but also to the varied meanings they convey within respondents’ social contexts. In re-working identities through dress codes, participants are exploring new identities as they strategically employ dress codes so as to signify particular strands of their gender identities. In the following section, I focus on how respondents think they affirm, and hence, *perform* their identities. In essence, I outline their thoughts about what *makes* them who they are, thereby exploring how respondents contest and construct their identities so as to generate new gender identities. Through this analysis, I further highlight the significance of dress as not only a marker of identity, but also as a core concept aiding respondents to construct and hence, affirm their gender identities within the spaces of education and employment.

5.3 AFFIRMING WHO I AM

5.3.1 *Performing* ‘Britishness’ and ‘South Asianess’

In this section, I look at how participants *perform* (by affirmation) their identities so as to illustrate the ways in which young Muslim women are generating new identities through their engagements with discourses around meanings of ‘Britishness’ and ‘South Asianess’. By ‘perform’, I refer to the reasons and the agency involved in making respondents think: ‘what *makes* me British and South Asian’? As I argued in Chapter Two, the construction of gender identities remains a *performance* (Butler, 1990: 25). Consequently, the active negotiation of identities by women reflects the possibility of embracing alternative femininities and hence, subjective (and diverse) performances. Here, I therefore concentrate on how participants affirm their gender identities through this notion of performance, which conveys choice and agency. This analysis hence throws light on how respondents, as they actively negotiate social contexts and decide to perform particular aspects of their identities (*Nadia’s emphasis*):

*‘Well British...being born here and the westernised culture I’ve embraced, Pakistani...my parents, I don’t think I’ve made myself Pakistani if that makes sense, so I don’t **make** myself Pakistani, there’s nothing Pakistani about me, I **can’t become** Pakistani but my parents and my grandparents keep bringing me back’ (Nadia).*

Nadia claims that although she inherited her parents' South Asian culture, she 'can't become' Pakistani as she is 'British' and has embraced British culture; for her, her Pakistani identity is 'brought back' to her through her family. Her choice of words (emphasised words) epitomises this idea of performance, and the levels of agency women may have in affirming contextual identities.

'I think British is the part that I know how to interact with other people...my mum, she doesn't say anything, she was brought up in Pakistan, she was brought up to think that way...submit. Whereas I wasn't, I went to an English school...I've had British values instilled in me...women are free here, independent' (Lubaina).

'What makes me British? It's the jeans that I wear and I think it's more about the opportunities here, independence and freedom and I was going out with an Afghani boy and they're different and that makes you aware of obviously, women don't have freedom everywhere and here, I'm living on my own and just being able to do what I'm doing' (Sanaa).

For both Sanaa and Lubaina, being 'British' means to have the ability and the freedom to express their views as women. Lubaina compares her mother's attitudes to her own, whereby she states that wanting to be 'independent' is part of her British identity. Likewise, Sanaa mentions the opportunities that are available to women in Britain; her 'jeans' and her lifestyle is what *makes* her 'British'. She demonstrates an autonomy which reflects the importance of clothes as a signifier of identity, as well as denotes a gendered identity informed by 'freedom' and having the choice to embrace 'opportunities'. While my respondents recognise that identities intertwine and it is difficult to separate them, nevertheless, in the process of reflecting on their negotiation of identities, they also formulate individual interpretations of what it means to be British, South Asian and Muslim.

Rashida separates her Muslim identity from her ethnic and citizenship identities. She suggests that 'culture' is the context, the 'environment' she finds herself in and therefore, will promote an aspect of her identity she sees fit, according to time and space:

'Well Muslim, that's my religion and my belief right and it's personal, and British I would say is the culture I'm in, like the environment like you kind of merge in with it, when you come to uni, you don't come in wearing salwar kameez, like I wear it at home like in summer, we think twice like me and my friends we do, we think twice before coming in to uni wearing it and we're like 'oh my God what will everyone think?' that you're not British... because it's like you want to merge in with everyone so I think that's British and Pakistani it's like I'm around my Pakistani culture, I think it's like with people you're around, what makes you comfortable' (Rashida).

Such active effort on her part denotes an acknowledgement to 'respect' ethnic boundaries; her embarrassment at the thought of being perceived as 'Pakistani' at university was apparent as she spoke about how she navigates 'clothing' as signifying factor whereby she

can be 'read' accordingly, with respect to context. Indeed, at university, a space seen as non-South Asian and therefore 'British', Rashida claims that wearing traditional South Asian clothing (salwar kameez) within educational settings would signify 'difference' and hence, for her, the inability to show that she is in effect, British. The affirmation of identities can therefore be contextual; at university Rashida, out of choice, wears jeans and tops so that her Pakistani identity is not perceived as obvious through clothing. In this process, Rashida *makes* herself 'British' and 'Pakistani' through dress codes. Sonia agrees and states:

'I'm British because I was born here and as long as they converge with Islam, like I wouldn't say I'm a practising Muslim but I wouldn't walk around wearing a mini-skirt in England, I could it's Britain but I don't...I do it on holiday but not here, it's different...Pakistani communities you can't...I get my culture and my traditions from them' (Sonia).

Sonia suggests that in affirming her British identity, her adherence to Islam should not be compromised. As such, as a Muslim who is part of a South Asian Muslim community in England, Sonia would not wear a mini-skirt as although her British context allows for it, her Pakistani context does not; yet, Sonia does not mind wearing it when she goes to Spain. Her affirmation of a Muslim identity must hence be understood through her cultural context (Pakistani community), whereby cultural standards (here female modesty by dressing appropriately) influence women's negotiations and perceptions of their identities. Clearly, respondents, although comfortable with using hyphenated identities, show that in separating 'British' and 'Pakistani' through contextual behaviour (adopting appropriate clothing), they consciously create, and *make* the British and Asian dichotomy. Yet, what is evident is that clothing can also have the adverse effects of participants feeling constrained and restricted in freely choosing what to wear, how to behave, and which path, British or Asian, to adopt. As Rahila explains:

'I'm Asian, it's mostly Asian people in Dewsbury so you have to be careful and it's a close-knit community, for me to wear a short skirt people would talk even though I'm a doctor, I have to be careful of what I wear...I wear cropped trousers, used to have jeans but I've thrown them all out cause I used to wear them to university. I've got like trousers but even then my husband is like 'don't wear that' and tops full-neck and half sleeves that's the thing about being British and Pakistani, in an English area, would have been different, a lot of people down here are Pakistani and every way you look at, it's Pakistani! Because I live here, I feel like I have to dress in a certain way or do things the way Pakistanis do, it's the culture, you have to wear things that are appropriate' (Rahila).

Rahila claims that her dress code is governed by the community norms of her locality, where as an 'Asian woman', she feels the need to respect certain codes, albeit imposed. In effect, Rahila is negotiating identity in 'place' (context) so as to fulfil her community's expectations of what would be considered 'appropriate'; indeed, she stopped wearing jeans

as she does not attend university anymore. In switching dress codes, Rahila demonstrates the apparent changes in how she presents herself and ultimately, reflects an aspect of her gender identity which is informed by community expectations. In Chapter Four, I reiterated how prescribed norms of behaviour for women around for instance, daughters' social activities at university, influence respondents' positionings within educational or work settings. Dwyer's research (2000: 59) demonstrates similar trends, whereby 'young women become boundary markers for a community whose collective identity is embodied in their 'authentic' ethnic dress and its signification for moral propriety'. 'Ethnic' dressing styles therefore act as indicators which frame the contours of ethnic identification for respondents. As the quote below reveals, women's appearances reflect the community's rules of how women's bodies must be perceived, hence evoking discourses around the construction of ethnic identities through dress codes, which participants remain acutely aware of:

'Depending on the community you come from, if it's a really Asian community you'll be influenced in more Asian way, like culture, the community expects you to behave or dress in certain ways whereas if you live in a white area you won't have as much Asian ways, cause if you live in an Asian community, as hard as you try to be British, you'll always have some Asian things about you' (Rubina).

Rubina's stark contrast between 'British' and 'Asian' cultural standards is prominent as she explains how women's localities and geographical residential areas' distribution of racialised and ethnic identities could influence the maintenance of cultural traditions. Locality and geography therefore remain important in negotiating 'British' and 'Asian' identities, and Rubina's words demonstrate the ambivalence which exists when navigating Britishness and Asianess. Nevertheless, at the same time, some respondents reiterate that there can be common grounds between them as they consider multiculturalism as a space bridging cultural 'differences':

'My way of living is that I'm British and I've got my friends and everyone is the same and the only difference comes in with your religion and your culture, so it doesn't have an impact on anything you do socially, you can still go out even though you don't drink and also the fact that it is multicultural and people understand, it's not like they're 'oh what's that?'... you are Muslim and they understand Eid and they may even wish you, so they appreciate the differences and the similarities and you usually have more similarities with them because the cultural aspect, that's more family and more private than public' (Tasneem).

For Tasneem, her British identity is used to act as a leveller in 'multicultural' Britain, where similarities with wider British society are more evident than 'differences'; for Tasneem, multiculturalism in Britain enables non-South Asians and non-Muslims to understand her ethnic and religious background and heritage. Tasneem's ethnic and religious identities are manifested in the 'private' sphere of the home; her citizenship identity remains her primary and 'public' identity, a strategy which provides Tasneem with the power to get fully

involved in British society. This discourse about 'multiculturalism' is also explored by Haleema, who assumes that Britishness and 'multiculturalism' are mutually inclusive, thereby providing a space which celebrates the diversity of experiences:

'Being Pakistani doesn't really matter because we are so multicultural, being Pakistani is just a part of it, it makes it more interesting and a bit different from other people but it doesn't influence me as much because I don't feel that I've got too many Pakistani values, as in cultural values, if I compare my family to other Pakistani families where they are typical' families' who marry off their daughters, arrange their marriage when they're young and give them no education' (Haleema).

Haleema affirms that her Pakistani identity resolves itself merely to cultural heritage, whereby she celebrates the options of being 'multicultural' simultaneously, maintains a distance from what she perceives Pakistani 'culture' to be. The term 'typical', used by Haleema, denotes a difference which indicates that for her, 'typical' reflects norms such as arranged marriages and limited education for girls. For her, 'cultural values' are encouraged by 'typical families', who perpetuate customs such as arranged marriages that may infringe on women's educational achievements; a custom that Haleema does not consider as part of her Pakistani identity as she remains unaffected by it. Hence, although Haleema is keen to acknowledge her South Asian background, she demarcates herself from stereotypical depictions of what Pakistani families ('typical') stand for.

'I think what makes me Pakistani is my parents. But everything I do or say, the way I am is because of my British upbringing, I don't think it has anything to do with being Pakistani but then some things do cause you have to have like a Paki mentality to understand things like you can't be 18 and just mess around with a boy, that's where the Paki mentality comes in...messing around means getting into a relationship that has no future, you have to start thinking of the future and marriage although you're just 18...unlike Caucasians, non-Asians like white society they don't usually, they have relationships yes but the marriage thing not really, it doesn't matter to them' (Rubina).

Again, Rubina highlights that her British upbringing and the Pakistani cultural influence she inherited from her parents both 'make' her; she reflects on how her understandings are nevertheless tainted by a 'Paki mentality'. Here, she particularly relates to attitudes towards relationships (boyfriends), where the community's cultural standards demand that young women behave in expected ways; in Rubina's context, at 18 years old, having casual relationships is not acceptable, whereas comparatively, in British 'white society', according to Rubina, marriage and serious relationships may not be viewed as primordial at such a young age. Although Rubina claims that 'everything' about her is because of her 'British upbringing', her ethnic background still has a bearing on the ways in which she perceives and interprets her social world. This further reinforces the notion that

ethnic and racialised boundaries are structured within unstable categories, thereby remaining subject to how individuals re-work, contest, and construct their identities.

This section has therefore focused on the ways in which respondents affirm their gender identities through educational and work spaces. I have demonstrated that through their agency, participants choose which identity to *perform*, according to time and space (context). For instance, this is epitomised through the dress codes and the modes of behaviour women choose to adopt as they strive to remain culturally sensitive in negotiating the Britishness versus Asianess dichotomy. Drawing on the theoretical premise that gendered identities remain embedded in performances, it is clear that respondents are actively affirming their distinct identities as they negotiate boundaries. In the following section, I focus on how respondents maintain ethnic and religious customs so as to further analyse how participants affirm their gender identities. In paying particular attention to practices such as weddings, food and language, I focus on how respondents illustrate their performances of identities through their negotiations of such practices. As they engage with cultural and religious practices, respondents navigate cultural and religious boundaries which aid in the construction of their gender identities.

5.3.2 Maintaining South Asian ethnic and religious traditions

In this section, I reflect on whether South Asian Muslim women in Britain think that participating in ethnic and religious traditions is important for their generation; I do so because I believe that the maintenance of ethnic and Islamic customs reflect the ways in which participants affirm their identities. As they navigate ethnic and religious traditions, they develop spaces so as to generate new gender identities as Muslim women. More specifically, respondents emphasise that fasting periods (Ramadan), and Eid (Muslim festival marking the end of Ramadan) remain religious events which help them affirm their identities as Muslims. As for the maintenance of ethnic identity, language, food and weddings act as significant conduits for cultural transmission across generations. Indeed, my study demonstrates that respondents' willingness to promote South Asian languages, food and wedding traditions remain potent, thereby signifying that even though participants embrace 'British' ideals, they are also ready to retain South Asian traditions.

The majority of respondents believe that young people in their generation are upholding ethnic and religious traditions in the UK. Others reflect on the fact that cultural traditions are gradually fading away as generations grow and develop in a British context. As for religion, the majority of respondents believe that young people are actively involved

in promoting their Muslim identities, except for one respondent, who thinks that even religion is eroding in a 'secular' society:

'Even though we're trying to all re-affirm our culture, we're all losing our cultural touch and traditions and values and we're fitting in more with the western culture and I think sometimes we lose perspectives on what we see is a good way to be brought up even on the religious side, I don't know many people that pray five times a day, not many young women who were brought up here that pray five times a day and quite religious I mean even if they pray they're not that religious so I think we are more and more becoming secular' (Habibah).

Habibah reflects that 'religiosity' among young Muslims is being heavily influenced by secularism, which for her, is indomitably a 'western' lifestyle that Muslims are increasingly adopting; the loss of religious values such as praying is due to 'western culture', which for Habibah, probably encourages more liberal and less rigid frameworks that could help the maintenance of religious values. Yet, young women suggest that there are various ways in which ethnic and religious customs are being maintained. Marriage ties and Asian style wedding celebrations, encouraged by the older generation, are mentioned by respondents as effective ways to protect cultural and religious continuity in South Asian Muslim families and communities in the UK. Nevertheless, differences in how generations affirm ethnic and religious traditions are noted by my research participants; young people are more in tune with religion as opposed to culture.

The observance of Ramadan and Eid remain important traditions for respondents to keep in touch and affirm their Muslim identities, as claimed by the vast majority of respondents. As Bushra suggests, getting involved in activities promoted by parents, and maintaining contact with cultural traditions inherited from their parents is what helps to define and set apart a 'British Muslim Asian identity':

'I think people tend to follow what their parents do I suppose and it's a way of getting an identity, it's a way of saying you're different and you are a British Muslim Asian, it's a way to maintain that identity and that's a way to do that' (Bushra).

Tasneem agrees, stating:

'My parents have taught me, I would do the same like maintain your religion and your cultural values and you would actually transfer them to your children...right now, if someone hasn't had a big cultural input in their life and they let it go and they don't celebrate Eid anymore or fasting isn't such a big thing, if our generation goes by that, it will die out at some point so with me, if I don't make sure that my kids know what I want them to know about Islam and my culture there is no reason why they'd know otherwise if you don't teach it to them here' (Tasneem).

As such, Tasneem thinks that the future generation should be taught about South Asian culture and Islam, where if no effort is made, values get lost. Nonetheless, respondents

maintain that periods such as Ramadan and Eid encourage Muslims to get together and carry on religious customs within university or work environments. As Sadia and Faiza explain:

'Festivities, like Eid and Ramadan, I went home, I was like I really need to make an effort...last year, I went out and got hammered and it was a disgrace...but it's really difficult on your own like there is no community spirit and you need that...I've got a few friends here but managed to do it, it was pretty tough to get up, sleep and go to work, even at university if there are a few of us then you can do it... then I went home for the last six Ramadans and it was so much nicer, much more sociable' (Sadia).

'Parents do engage on cultural and religious traditions, very regular basis, it's a way of life for them so things like Ramadan and so on...but we do it still, so it's more or less the same really, it's harder at university yes but it's not impossible if you have friends who are the same as you' (Faiza).

Indeed, Sadia and Faiza suggest that the family makes it easier for young people to regularly uphold an interest in practising Islam; family and community spirit do influence young women to fast despite the difficulty of juggling work and studies, which is reflected in Fawzia's account:

'Eid is important but here it clashes, it's always on a school day... I know that it's not as important for me as it is for my parents, it's extremely important for them and there was quite a big argument in my family because my sister wanted to work on Eid and it was a big deal for mum she said it's not something that she could ever imagine and the thing is for me, Eid has always been to wake up ridiculously early, get dressed and eat, families come over but it's just the excitement like Christmas and even I, I do get excited for Christmas and you feel it because everyone is excited but no one is excited around you and you feel stupid for feeling excited for nothing and firstly it inconveniences you and secondly, no one is feeling excited so you just feel kind of mediocre and that's how I've always been and my mum doesn't like that and she doesn't want to accept it and she's like 'no it is an important thing' and I know it's important but I do think that certain things are a lot more important to her culturally and you know people come with sweets' (Fawzia).

From my research sample, she is the only respondent to very honestly express that the British context has had a bearing on the way she feels about how Eid must be celebrated. Unsurprisingly, Fawzia, in her current context, does not feel comfortable to manifest her Muslim identity and celebrate Eid by demonstrating 'excitement' for an event which for her, remains an 'inconvenience'. Interestingly, Fawzia defines herself as a 'practising Muslim' but as her comments reflect, her attitudes towards a major Muslim festival do not signify considerable attachment, as she doesn't separate culture from religion.

The majority of respondents also claim that in British South Asian Muslim communities, ethnic identity is kept alive, on a daily basis, through food. For them, food seems to contribute significantly to the ways in which participants affirm their identities:

'Food maintains the culture! (Laugh) especially food like I mean which Pakistani would be cooking fish and chips? They do it around food and festival' (Rashida).

'I noticed when I moved to Bradford the culture here is so much more evident, like, even things like in the restaurants here, you know, halal meat, you get catered for, there are mosques everywhere...In that sense, definitely, Bradford is a lot more cultured, in Asian style anyway, than Glasgow' (Asma).

As Asma claims, locality also makes a difference as to how young people are able to maintain cultural and religious traditions. Recounting her experiences, she highlights that Bradford and Glasgow do not provide the same space where identities can be expressed; talking about halal food, Asma suggests that the availability of halal meat, a simple practical fact, would influence and make it easier for Muslims to be able to maintain the religious tradition of consuming halal food.

Participants also view language as a potent way to maintain and affirm ethnic identity. Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 154) have highlighted the importance of language in British South Asian communities. Their research shows that for young British South Asian Muslims, bilingualism (in speaking English and a South Asian language) helps them develop new relationships with the majority culture by speaking two languages fluently, as compared to the previous generation of South Asians in Britain, who rely heavily on South Asian languages to communicate. The latter hence find it difficult to fully integrate due to language barriers. From my sample, all respondents spoke English and most respondents spoke Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Kashmiri or Bengali fluently at home, particularly within family gatherings, in their private spheres. A minority could understand ethnic languages but had difficulty in speaking them. Within public spheres such as work or university, English remained their primary mode of communication. Nevertheless, making an effort to speak South Asian languages remains important to respondents in order to promote their continuity:

'I will speak Urdu definitely to my children... it's really important as it reinforces culture, it's a way of reminding you that you're, not different but just to remember that you have this culture kind of thing and it sets you apart from other people, language is important to me' (Fawzia).

'I feel so proud that my parents have taught me Urdu and I will do the same for my children. I know families who have taught their children just English and the relationship, you just lose it because the parents they don't know good English in the first place but they should have kept the other language and I think comparing me to them, it's totally different cause I can talk to anyone but they're basically fully British' (Tasneem).

Indeed, when I asked respondents whether they would want their children to speak and understand South Asian languages, most respondents answered 'Yes'. Being able to communicate easily when they go to South Asia, and upholding cultural heritage were

reasons given to explain why young women depict an interest to maintain ethnic languages. Again, going back to drawing the boundaries of 'Britishness' and 'Asianess', Tasneem highlights that if the next generation is not taught Urdu by their parents, they will be like some children (in her community) who are 'fully British', thereby suggesting that some children could be too British if they speak just English. Echoing Tasneem's concerns, Haleema suggests that South Asians are already increasingly manifesting British values and this is primarily epitomised through language; although she speaks Urdu with her parents, English remains the primary language adopted with siblings and friends:

'With the younger generation I think a lot has changed because with my generation, Muslims are more British than they used to be and with every aspect of life, with food, with dressing...like my parents' generation would use their own languages more, but I speak Urdu at home with my parents, with my dad if we're talking on an academic basis, then we talk in English, especially political stuff, with my friends I speak in English, with my brother and sister English and with my parents we speak in Urdu if necessary' (Haleema).

Yasmin is the only respondent who explains why Punjabi would not be an important issue when it comes to her children; she wants the latter to be in a position to understand Islam primarily through personal capabilities rather than from 'other people' or second hand sources. Indeed, Yasmin prefers that her children learn Arabic, instead of Punjabi:

'The priority for my kids would be Arabic and English...Punjabi is not the most important thing...I think my children will be more the definition of British Muslim than I will be cause I've still got some cultural stuff in me but for them I'd like them to be more comfortable in Arabic and English more than anything...because of religion, to help them understand the Qur'an because to me religion is the most important thing that you can pass on to your children and if you understand Arabic it gives you an entirely new dimension to your understanding of religion. What we're living now is very two-dimensional, we're having to learn it from other people and when you read the Qur'an you have to read it in English and you don't always get the full meaning so I'd like to learn Arabic myself' (Yasmin).

For Yasmin, Arabic would be a priority so that children are able to understand Islam and read the Qur'an without resorting to English as medium of understanding. The concept of 'British Muslimness', for Yasmin, will come with the next generation; according to her, they will have less of a cultural influence and more of an Islamic identity. Clearly, Yasmin's Islamic identity takes priority over ethnic identity, where her citizenship identity is also considered as more valuable than ethnic heritage for the oncoming generation. Affirming 'Muslimness', through Arabic, rather than affirming 'South Asianess' through Punjabi, becomes a strategy for Yasmin to clearly separate religion from culture. In the following section, I attempt to further explore how participants affirm their identities as they navigate Islam and South Asian culture. I concentrate on how participants negotiate the dichotomy 'religion' versus 'culture' into more detail. Analysing why respondents make this significant

distinction is vital as it illustrates the active negotiations encouraging educated Muslim women to firmly draw boundaries between what they understand as ‘culture’ and what they perceive as ‘religion’. Through their negotiations of ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’ boundaries, they find spaces to affirm and assert new gender identities.

5.3.3 Negotiating ‘religion’ versus ‘culture’

As participants maintain ethnic and religious traditions, it is evident that they are negotiating the dichotomy ‘religion’ versus ‘culture’. In this section, I focus on how they explore the boundaries of this dichotomy; participants are increasingly separating ‘religion’ from ‘culture’ as they consider the ways in which they *perform* identities and ultimately, through this process, develop new gender identities. In particular, respondents maintain how social events such as weddings, as well as social environment, here communities, outline the blurry line which defines the ‘religion’ versus ‘culture’ dichotomy. Below, a discussion of weddings and marriage brings these distinctions into focus. In fact, they illustrate how young educated Muslim women are actively negotiating ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ so as to form new understandings of marriage and weddings. Through their negotiations, women are able to exert independent choices as to how they navigate cultural and religious precepts associated with weddings within their communities. As such, this process of exploration encourages respondents to develop new gender identities. As Rubina reflects:

‘Weddings help to preserve those traditions, if you go to a traditional wedding, they do so much cultural stuff and I like it, and you do keep culture alive and it’s not even a Muslim thing, the Muslim bit, the marriage, is the nikah and everything else, that’s culture and I wouldn’t want a one day wedding and that’s my Asian side talking, I know the difference and I have the options and I decide to do both the culture and the religion bit, this is it with us now, we go into it like knowing why we are doing it, we are educated about it, we are not like our mothers or grandmothers, they just got on with it but we don’t’ (Rubina).

Rubina exposes the tension ‘religion’ versus ‘culture’ as she considers how weddings help in the promotion of cultural identity; engaging in ‘cultural stuff’ during weddings informs her definition of ‘traditional’, which as she reveals, is ‘not a Muslim thing’ but is informed by ‘culture’. Although Rubina demonstrates an awareness of how closely these two remain, she is willing, and also expects, to not have a ‘one-day wedding’. As she claims ‘we are educated about it’ and Rubina demonstrates that she is very keen on negotiating her ‘options’. This is put in sharp contrast to the levels of involvement women of the previous generation had as far as weddings or marriage was concerned. This difference indicates the extent to which choice, independence and agency, gained through educational and work experiences, influences respondents’ redefinition and understandings of marriage and weddings within their communities.

I develop the theme of marriage and the role it plays in young British South Asian Muslim women's lives in the next chapter (Chapter Six) of the thesis. For now, I look at how social milieu and communities' influence also determine the extent to which South Asian Muslims in Britain 'affirm' cultural identities. As some respondents stress, the role which communities play in respondents' lives influence the extent to which cultural and religious identities are affirmed. An insight into how communities affect respondents' negotiations of their identities remains important to my study as it reveals how social environments impact on women's evolution of gender identities. Haleema links the maintenance of ethnic traditions with education and social class, arguing that people from working-class backgrounds are less reluctant to give up customs as opposed to middle and upper social classes, who according to her, are more 'liberal':

'I think people who are high like in terms of income or education, tradition is not so important, like the working-class, they tend to maintain tradition more because I don't think they are as exposed to other environments and other cultures because for them it's work and home, this sort of cycle whereas the upper-classes because they are more well travelled, more liberal' (Haleema).

It seems that 'lifestyle' opportunities such as 'travelling' and exposure to the wider world leads to a re-evaluation of 'tradition', which conveys different meanings for people of different social milieus. This is a significant point for British South Asian Muslim women who enter educational and work spaces. As I previously argued in Chapter Four, through higher education and paid employment, respondents are negotiating boundaries in order to encourage upward social mobility and hence, promote the evolution of their gender identities. However, their negotiations also reflect the tensions which Haleema defines as 'traditional' versus 'liberal'.

'It's about promoting religion in a decent manner, in mosques you have people come in to talk to others about it and there is a general awareness in society that you have to let some things go if you want to move ahead with your time but also you don't want a complete rebellion with your children and then you're just gonna have to accept it and obviously there are boundaries which are drawn still so it works out it's about how narrow-minded or open you are' (Tasneem).

Similarly, Tasneem also highlights 'open-mindedness' and maintains that it is about keeping a balance so that the next generation finds it possible to carry on traditions.

'At the end of the day it's personal choice and the new generations, like I think that depends on the family you come from cause some families and communities are still like backwards cause they want to keep their kids close and not let them be free, be their own person, the community sets the rules...but some families are do what you want as long as it makes you happy otherwise you don't really get the chance to be you so you can't break out' (Rubina).

Rubina suggests that maintenance of culture and religion should be ‘personal’, thereby denying that the family and community must ‘aid’ in the continuity of customs. For young people who feel familial pressure to conform to set community ideals, which she defines as ‘backwards’, Rubina opposes conformity to agency. From this, she articulates how individual perceptions about identities can also be submerged by collective identity (through communities) which conspires to prevent young Muslims from being ‘free’ to express individuality; women are hence expected to conform to community ideals. Again, Rubina’s thoughts demonstrate that higher education gives respondents a strong sense of agency and individualism in order to push boundaries enforced by their communities. The role of community is hence important in drawing Muslim women to adhere to cultural traditions. Dwyer’s (2000: 53-68) research portrays the ways in which ‘the politics of community’ impact on young women’s construction and contestation of identities. Drawing on Hall’s concept of generating ‘new ethnicities’ whereby communities become the medium for contestation, Dwyer (2000) maintains that spaces for personal negotiation are created. In essence, she maintains that constructions of community, through the ‘imaginings of a Muslim community’, can therefore reveal how an ‘understanding of identities as positionings’ may reflect active political negotiations in context. Echoing Dwyer’s (2000) findings of communities monitoring women’s behaviour, my research similarly shows that communities act as a medium where participants feel that one’s deeds are policed, and where younger generations learn about cultural values and standards such as ‘respecting elders’ of the community.

‘They take the kids back to make sure you feel your culture, go and visit your village...This is what your grandpa used to do, They make sure you’re taught the language at home, and cook food, watch a film, send you to madrassa, which is essentially being done for culture, not religion, there’s the tension you see’ (Sabina).

Respondents also talk about the parental strategy of planning family trips to the sub-continent so that young people are exposed to South Asian culture and remain aware of their ethnic and cultural heritage. The tradition of young people going to madrassas to learn about Islam is still being kept, whereby in this research, the majority of women went to their local madrassas when they were young. However, Mushirah disagrees with these set principles, suggesting that communities and families are too focused on promoting cultural values that remain ‘outdated’, thereby losing touch with reality and hence, ignoring younger generations’ real pleas. In fact, as Sabina suggests, the pressure exerted by parents and communities on young people to uphold cultural traditions demonstrates the ‘tension’ emanating from the ‘religion’ versus ‘culture’ dichotomy.

'Families or communities do not help at all, they mix culture and religion...if a boy does something wrong they hide it, if a girl does something wrong it's all over the place, that's where they go wrong...outdated cultural stuff, discrimination between the sexes, there's no role models for these boys, their fathers are sat in the mosque and they don't have a clue that their sons are selling drugs in the corner but pretending everything is fine and it's not; real issues are not seen' (Mushirah).

Indeed, for Mushirah, gender discrimination is evident in how girls' and boys' behaviour is monitored. This contributes to a lack of understanding of the current context that young British South Asian Muslims find themselves in, hence further widening the gap between how generations perceive 'religion' and 'culture'. 'Sitting at the mosque', as Mushirah reiterates, does not allow fathers to fully grasp the 'real issues' affecting young Muslims in her community. I further discuss the 'tensions' that Mushirah expresses in framing how families and communities generate conflictive relationships as these lead to differences in how young British South Asian Muslim women affirm their religious versus cultural identities, in comparison to their parents'/grandparents' generations. Indeed, Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 147-149) in focusing on 'generational difference, suggest that differences can be accounted for by the fact that the first generation of South Asian migrants 'were strategic in a geographical and economic sense, while the second, in the cultural and political arenas'. This implies that in negotiating 'cultural and political' arenas, young Muslims in Britain are re-affirming 'different' identities. They do so more efficiently by denouncing that the previous generations still mix culture and religion, as opposed to the younger generations. As Sabina states:

'It's blurred for the old generation, culture and religion...a good example is for wedding ceremonies, especially like the mehendi, why do you put oil on, why do you do this, and why do you do that... though there were elements in our culture that conflicted with the religion' (Sabina).

Respondents make it clear that generational relations between themselves and their parents, grandparents or other relatives/friends of previous generations can be conflictive as the latter tries hard to impose kinship values upon their children:

'We're talking about identity and the Pakistani identity, we're changing that cause we're integrating and it's so simple, what we're doing is working at it, integrating and still keeping the culture...by integrating means we actually meet new people and that does not mean that we forget who we are when it comes to Ramadan...I'm happy to tell them cause it's something I'm proud of...I advertise the good things and the bad bits I can hold my hands up and say I know and that's the old generation' (Mushirah).

'They try and live a Pakistani lifestyle within their own four walls, they try to bring the kids up within that' (Sabina).

Older and younger generations perceive, react and embrace ethnic and religious traditions differently, hence bringing about social change in their communities. Previous

research (Wade and Souter, 1992; Goodey, 2001; Webster, 2003) has demonstrated that South Asian communities are experiencing a 'break-down' as ethnic traditions are beginning to be re-worked by younger generations. However, Bagguley and Hussain (2008: 149) maintain that intergenerational conflict must be viewed as 'the product of cultural hybridisation, higher levels of educational attainment, class mobility and the related emergence of new ethnicities among young South Asian people'. Indeed, this reflects respondents' attitudes towards the challenging intergenerational relationships and community pressures they face; nevertheless, they are re-making and hence, managing 'new' identities in the process of re-evaluating what 'religion' and 'culture' entail. In this section, I have therefore demonstrated how respondents are actively affirming their gender identities as they negotiate the dichotomy 'religion' versus 'culture'. Through dress codes, language, food, and religious events such as Ramadan and Eid, participants strategically handle their different social identities, where they actively demarcate which practice is 'cultural' and which practice is 'religious'. Their negotiations nevertheless reflect the tension which exists between 'religion' and 'culture' as they navigate these two concepts so as to affirm their ethnic and religious identities. As respondents make this important distinction between 'religion' and 'culture', young women are re-negotiating their perceptions of gender identities by formulating new understandings of what ethnic and religious traditions entail. As such, differences in their understandings indicate an evolution in Muslim women's gender identities, whereby participants deploy the confidence and independence gained at university and work so as to challenge 'religious' and 'cultural' boundaries, which are often imposed upon them by the previous generations. In the last section of this chapter, I concentrate on the ways in which participants manage Muslimness; more specifically, I reflect on how educated British South Asian Muslim women negotiate gender identities as they contest and construct meanings of Muslimness in their social contexts.

5.4 MANAGING MUSLIMNESS

In this last section of this chapter, I illustrate how respondents manage Muslimness and ultimately, generate new gender identities as they explore educational and work settings. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that experiences of higher education and employment are leading young Muslim women to evaluate their gendered identities, and acknowledge the possible impacts this process may have on their future life options. As they reshape their identities and become assertive in affirming their new gender identities, respondents demonstrate agency and choice in generating new perceptions of their identities. I begin this section by questioning the use of the term 'British Muslim', which

comprises the affixation of citizenship identity with religious identity. These strands of respondents' identities, as revealed earlier in this chapter, remain contested notions leading participants to actively engage with discourses around Islam, national belonging and citizenship in order to articulate their distinctive identities in multicultural Britain. Indeed, a term such as 'British Muslim', employed by respondents, is not only used to define themselves, but to also portray how they choose to prioritise their identities (discussed in Section 5.4.1), thereby indicating agency as in how they decide to affirm their identities. In fact, I reflect on whether religious identity for Muslim women is gaining ground in Britain and I also raise debates about how participants express their Islamic identities through their understandings and interpretations of Islam; as participants explore their perceptions of Islam, they re-work their gender identities as Muslim women as they begin to embrace new meanings of religion.

Also, throughout this chapter, I have emphasised the role which dress codes play in aiding young women to *express* and *perform* their identities as they explore new spaces such as higher education and work. In this section, I elaborate on respondents' notions of the hijab and the ways in which the hijab, as clothing, contributes to the construction of Islamic identities in the UK. I further reiterate the role of dress as being a contested signifier of identity, more specifically, the signifier of a religious identity for participants. These analyses highlight how respondents are engaging with discourses on Islam and Islamic identities in Britain so as to develop and articulate new gender identities as British South Asian Muslim women. As young Muslim women reflect on their positionings, their negotiations of Islam as educated Muslim women not only demonstrate the changes women are experiencing as they navigate educational and work options, but also indicate how respondents manage their evolving gender identities.

5.4.1 Framing British Muslimness

Parekh (2006: 199), in focusing on Muslim identities in the European context of liberalism and integration, underlines that the term 'British Muslim' offers a range of meanings. For some, it could merely convey the physical presence of Muslims in Britain who pay full allegiance to the *Ummah* and remain 'unattached' to the country of adoption (Britain). Or for others, it could mean that Britain is perceived as home and they feel loyal; in that case, being 'British' reflects their political involvement and 'Muslim', their religious affiliations. More importantly, 'British Muslim' may also indicate the possibility that Muslims express not only loyalty to Britain but also adopt cultural values 'shaped by the British way of life'; 'Britishised Muslims' as Parekh (2006: 199) puts forward, may yet be another term suitable to express this idea where Muslims' understandings of Islam, the

Qur'an and Islamic history are shaped by British values/attitudes, hence producing a 'distinct British form of Islam'. This is relevant to my research as Muslim women, with increased educational achievements, actively and independently understand 'Muslimness' on their own terms, thereby creating scope for developing new gender identities which remain embedded within a discourse of choice, agency and independence. As Parekh (2006: 181) maintains, different from their parents' Islam, young Muslims' Islam is a 'self-conscious public statement, not a quietly held personal faith, but a matter of identity'.

I asked respondents about their views on the term 'British Muslim', and whether they believe that the term existed some fifty years ago. All respondents answered 'No' to this question, agreeing that it is a 'new' or 'modern' term. Respondents illustrate why 'British Muslim', as a term, is increasingly being used in the UK by the younger generations, denoting generational changes in approaches to Muslim identities, political stances following local and global events, media stereotypes of Muslimness as well as debates about integration and multiculturalism. Haleema explains:

'I'm Muslim British. I'd put it that way as people would say British Muslim but for me being British is really important but being Muslim, my faith is first, Islam says that your identity is really important so being British is linked to being a Muslim for me...some people would say British first but being British doesn't encompass all of the values that to being a Muslim does whereas being Muslim upholds the values of being British and being a Muslim so for me, it is about being Muslim British' (Haleema).

Interestingly, Haleema is the only respondent who claims that 'Muslim British' is a more appropriate term, explaining that Islamic values encompass British values and not vice-versa. In saying that 'faith' comes first as an identity, Haleema reiterates the concept of the Muslim *Ummah*, a universal Muslim community that cuts across 'race', ethnicity, culture and gender. Indeed, the manifestation of an Islamic identity through the *Ummah* aids in constructing a universal Islamic identity which aids Muslims in Britain to remain connected across local communities (Brown, 2006: 419). Similarly, Dwyer's study (2000: 477) demonstrates that the idea of the *Ummah*, offering scope for pan-Islamic discourses, contributes to young Muslim women negotiating 'new' ways of dealing with diasporic identities. As Afshar *et al's* (2005: 11) research on Muslim women in Britain also shows- 'faith supersedes nationality, race and ethnicity', hence defining the 'trans-nationality' character of the *Ummah*. Their turn to religion, according to Afshar *et al.*, (2005), reflects political activism on the part of Muslim women to unite as 'Muslim women', where ethnicity and nationality are not prioritised over Islam.

I also highlight the political stance adopted by participants as they explain why the term 'British Muslim' is increasing in its popularity. Mushirah, classing herself as 'second

generation', illustrates how her generation is fighting gender inequalities in their communities so as to epitomise the idea of 'British Muslim', which inherently for her, expresses the idea of Muslim women as being independent in Britain:

'There are three generations now, the first generation didn't have that title, second generation started to introduce themselves into British society and I class myself as second generation so I had to fight the struggle so I still have to cook and clean in my house whereas the boys don't and the third generation, the younger ones, the label 'British Muslim' is theirs, their mums have already lived through that transition so my child will be the third generation. I'm going to introduce chores but introduce them equally and discipline and education, equal again, not the cultural Pakistani notion of women not participating in society' (Mushirah).

In using a discourse of women's rights, Mushirah reflects that the third generation of Muslims in Britain will represent the notion of 'British Muslim' wholeheartedly when she maintains that 'the label is theirs'. Her use of the term 'British Muslim' indicates the 'struggle' that South Asian Muslim women are enduring so as to make the 'transition' to 'equal' gender rights. Also comparing generations, Sonia explains that migration status had more importance than Islam in the lives of first generation South Asian migrants:

'I'm not sure if Islam played such a big role, when my parents came with all this migration and immigration laws, if you look at multiculturalism back in those days it was more about immigration as opposed to religion, I think religion is more the new thing, the new identity' (Sonia).

Islam, for young people of her generation, is a 'new thing'; if older generations were inherently concerned with political positionings, young Muslims are readier to proclaim religious adherence as Sonia believes that it is established that they are 'British', through their citizenship rights. Sabina agrees:

'They've been here for 40 or 50 years...there's been a shift my Mum will definitely say she's Pakistani...it was more 'Pakis'...it was more like Pakistanis, Bengalis and so on...now it's more British and something else...like trying to get the right mix... people have different priorities like what they feel is important to them, or that should be my identity... Pakistani, Bengali or Indian, that's kind of lost in our generation cause we can't really identify with it, saying look I'm not Pakistani but I'm British and I'm Muslim, and this is why I'm different...it's a category' (Sabina).

Sabina further indicates that there are generational differences in the prioritising of identities as she explains the shift from 'Pakistani', 'Bengali' or 'Indian' to 'British Muslim' by emphasising that racialised identity, for the previous generation, remained the primary marker. As she maintains, 'you were brown then', Sabina's parents' experiences of Britain reflect a time where racialised and ethnic identity took precedence over religious identity, as opposed to now. The younger generation of South Asian migrants want to 'get the right mix' to express differences, now negotiated through Islam. For Fatimah, 'British Muslim' as

a concept developed after the racial tension which erupted during the Bradford (June 2001) and Oldham (May 2001) riots:

'The Bradford and Oldham riots and that's what it means to be British Muslim, with people realising that they're British but they're Muslims too, young people, a small thing becomes a big thing and to some, that term is about passion and because of being born and bred here, its affiliations to the British culture cause I would call it culture, being British is a culture and it is a way of saying 'we know who we are and you don't need to challenge it' because it's all due to politicians when they stereotype you, saying 'You're Asian' and you turn around you say 'No, I'm British, British Muslim' (Fatimah).

Fatimah highlights that Muslims must not be denied or excluded from 'British culture', which encompasses citizenship rights as well as cultural (here British) rights. Furthermore, Saeema emphasises a political approach to explain the use of that term, a product of 'modern' times, where post September 11 has raised an interest or even curiosity from people who 'want' to know someone's religion, hence highlighting a Muslim presence in Britain:

'No. I think it is quite a modern term... since 9/11, I think it escalated, we've had more tension...saying we're British and then emphasising the fact that we are Muslim...I started associating myself with 'British Muslim' was when I started uni...people say 'what are you?' and I say 'well I'm Asian' but then they ask for the religion, then I say 'British Muslim'...so 'British Muslim' goes more than 'British Pakistani' cause people they want to know if you're Muslim' (Saeema).

Bushra emphasises the fact that Muslims in Britain want to feel 'included' in British society and not be stigmatised as 'backward' or 'bombers'. Reflecting on discourses surrounding inclusionary and exclusionary politics, she maintains that citizenship and religious identities epitomised by 'British Muslim' signifies that her allegiances are both towards Britain and Islam, hence deconstructing the concept that 'Muslim' means 'backwards' and therefore 'non-British'. For Bushra, to say 'British Muslim' is a political statement signifying her right to live in British society:

'The media hype of Muslims as being backward, people saying things like 'Muslims are backwards, Muslims can't be British', saying well 'I'm Muslim and I am British too', there's this whole idea that Muslims don't want to be part of British society, they don't want to integrate but much rather follow the Saudis...but to say 'British Muslim' means 'I'm part of this country cause people think that when you're Muslim you can't be British, like you don't care about England, you just care about you religion, but you are paying taxes but people don't see that, just that you are Muslim and that you're bombing...they don't see that we are on their side we don't agree to that, and I think that's why the term 'British Muslim' is popular now' (Bushra).

Alternatively, Tasneem does not see the use or validity of the term 'British Muslim'; if anything it self-labels Muslims as 'different' and therefore encourages division instead of integration:

'There's no reason to say British Muslim...with British Pakistani it comes with ethnic origin like you don't hear people say 'British Jews' or 'British Catholics' so what does it like, what's the need for 'British Muslim'? I don't think you should bring religion into it, it's a personal thing so for me it's a new identity just to be different after 9/11, why can't you be normal, part of a society you don't need to do that, if you want to integrate, why label yourself?'(Tasneem).

Indeed, disagreeing with the politicised nature of the term 'British Muslim', Tasneem prefers the prioritisation of an ethnic identity over a Muslim identity, which for her, should remain 'personal' and therefore, private. Likewise, Rahila explains her apprehension, even fear, of using 'British Muslim' post 9/11. Rahila explains why she prefers to use the term 'British Pakistani':

'I don't ever use the term Muslim...I always say British Pakistani and I never ever use the term British Muslim...I'm scared to use that because of what's happened, after September 11 and all these terrorist things and they blame Muslims...most Pakistanis are Muslims anyway so if I say British Pakistani it's assumed that I'm British Muslim' (Rahila).

As Parekh (2000) claims, Muslims in Britain have faced racist antagonism due to their cultural differences since the 9/11 attacks. In fact, Rahila expresses her Muslimness through her ethnic heritage. She deliberately avoids mentioning she is Muslim in her attempts to display a more 'toned down' aspect of her religious identity. Sonia analyses the relevance of Islam in her life and as a non-practising Muslim, does not feel comfortable to use 'British Muslim':

'I don't use that term... if I was a practising Muslim I would but I don't because there are a lot of things I do that Muslims shouldn't do and that's the truth...there are many things that Islam condemns like alcohol, like wearing a T-Shirt and wearing tight clothes revealing my figure...I know there are certain boundaries that you need to follow which I haven't so how can I say I am a proper Muslim?' (Sonia).

For her, the degrees to which young women adhere to Islamic principles (levels of religiosity) may influence their decisions as to whether they should publicly define themselves as Muslims or not. In acknowledging that she is not a 'proper Muslim' and hence not fit to use 'British Muslim' as a term, Sonia categorises notions of Muslimness; she maintains that her 'tight clothes' do not give her the right to affirm, albeit publicly, that she is Muslim. This section has therefore demonstrated that respondents are politicising a religious identity through the use of the term 'British Muslim' as they explain why they choose or do not choose to define themselves as 'British Muslims'. In the following section,

I focus on the ‘meanings’ that respondents attribute to Islam as they reflect on the ways in which they value religion. In assessing the importance that religious identity may have in their lives, respondents demonstrate their negotiations of Islamic identities and hence, an evolution in their gender identities.

5.4.2 Meanings of Islam

‘I don’t want to pray but I’m just lazy but I believe Islam is more to do with respecting the values of the religion so it’s respecting the elders, I wouldn’t do something that I know my parents won’t be happy about so no going out clubbing or drinking or having meat that isn’t halal so it’s values rather than the beliefs, the core ones like Ramadan I always keep my fast, and give money to charity’ (Habibah).

I asked respondents what Islam means to them, and how they rate the importance of Islam in their lives. The ways in which participants understand Islam and the value they attribute to religion provides an insight into how diverse respondents’ perceptions about Islam are; their varied views indicate the apparent diversity in which respondents choose to affirm their Islamic identities. The majority of them define themselves as ‘practising Muslims’, two respondents consider themselves as ‘non-practising believing Muslims’. Only one respondent defines herself as a ‘liberal Muslim’. For Sadia, ‘liberal’ is equated with ‘having broken all barriers’. The only link she maintains with Islam, according to her, is the fact that she eats halal food:

‘I’d say a very liberal Muslim. I’ve broken all barriers except for one thing-like I always eat halal meat...that’s the only thing I stick to! one night we were somewhere and I asked whether the meat was halal and they were like yeah and then carried on to order a glass of red wine and my friends were like ‘What are you doing?!’ To me, it’s the only one link I’ve got and I have not broken but if I break that, then I’ve lost it all’ (Sadia).

Most respondents describe Islam as ‘a way of life’ while some maintain that it acts ‘as a set of rules and guidelines for you to live by’. A minority chooses to see Islam as ‘a spiritual path’, hence adopting a more personal or philosophical approach to the practise of Islam. Indeed, young women profess their Islamic faith in diverse ways, relying on their own understandings, experiences and interpretations of Islam, hence demonstrating the scope they have to contest and construct Muslimness in the UK. Respondents also raise the possibility of interpretations of Islam, thereby further stretching the roles played by Islam in the lives of young British South Asian Muslim women. Women are hence choosing individual lifestyles by negotiating religious Islamic principles. Amongst respondents in this research, the majority do not drink alcohol; four respondents have tried drinking for a while, whilst two respondents drink alcohol on a regular basis. Most of them eat nothing but halal meat except for one respondent, who eats non-halal meat as well as pork. For most

respondents, it appears that the practice of religion is defined by specific food, drink and behaviour.

However, for Alia and Sadia, Islam is not about food or physical presentation, but about the good deeds (charity) one endeavours to achieve, while remembering that God is ever present:

'People on the outside look and say she's religious, she's done well for herself, its more what's in their heart...It's about day-to-day actions, like charity ... I just don't see religion as being about clothing, about prayer, food... it's not just how I present myself...it's about the way I think, the way I treat other people... I tend to not see it as: Oh you must do this or you must not do that, not eat this or drink this but more practical than ritual...I'd like to pray as much as I can, I do fast... it really annoys me when I see other people passing judgments on how religious they perceive me to be as I dress in English clothes' (Alia).

'Religion to me should be a very personal thing... not the mosque or doing x, y and z... it's more a spiritual thing, what you believe and what you think and do, not a case of following that matters...doesn't mean if that person is reading this and that means that he or she is religious...it is actually humanity and being a good person' (Sadia).

Likewise, Farha maintains that Islam is 'personal' and however one wishes to practise must be left open:

'I'm a very spiritual person... I fast, I do the namaz, I went for umrah a few years ago and I plan to go to hajj at some point... but then I don't have any rigid views on stuff like how each person relates to God, I think it's very personal, I find it very satisfying to read namaz, so I do it for myself. And if somebody doesn't, then that's nothing to judge them on...it's a purely personal thing' (Farha).

Interestingly, Fawzia suggests that Islam gives room to be 'non-conformist', therefore providing a space for individualism. Improving the self is a priority, rather than wearing the hijab:

'Islam teaches you not conform to what everyone else is saying and to just be a better person, improve myself and then think about praying and hijab, than to do it the other way round but people here don't seem to do that, parents expect them to wear hijab and they betray people at the first drop of the hat and they find no problems in lying to their parents while my parents know exactly what I'm doing' (Fawzia).

Nonetheless, she highlights the irony in women being 'expected' to wear the hijab by their parents, thereby denoting an extremely conformist view of Islam. Echoing Fawzia's arguments, Yasmin, although comparing two different social contexts (Britain versus Saudi Arabia) in relation to the practice of Islam, reiterates that in Britain, she has the 'freedom' to express her beliefs, where the 'UK becomes the best place to be Muslim':

'I think because I live in a country where most people are non-Muslims, giving a good message around me about what Islam stands for...when I was younger, I was very idealistic about Saudi Arabia and that's the place to be if you want to be religious and wear black and be super holy but the more I travel, the more I realise that the UK is the best place to be a Muslim...you have the freedom to practise your religion so you can take it seriously because you've got that freedom, you don't have to be religious if you don't want to whereas if you do, you tend to do it properly and you understand it more whereas in the middle-east and south-Asia you would just go with the flow' (Yasmin).

Yasmin suggests that it is possible to combine a religious lifestyle to the 'modern' world where it is up to the individual to have an agency as to the extent to which one wants to practise. Yasmin compares the UK to Saudi Arabia, and maintains that Britain, a non-Muslim country, provides the ideal environment for her to practise and understand Islam freely as there is no pressure for her to 'go with the flow', like middle-eastern countries do. Here, she navigates, negotiates and constructs a personal view of her Islamic faith.

'I think it's mainly around making time to pray, and the way you dress up of course makes a big difference...show your modesty. But I also have to make sure that I carry on something Islamic' (Abida).

Opposing Alia's and Fawzia's view that the physical is not significant, Abida, who wears the hijab, maintains that dress is an important aspect of Islam, whereby 'modesty' must be viewed on the outside and made public, hence differing from the 'personal' attitude emphasised by other respondents. Furthermore, propagating the teachings of Islam is also encouraged so as to carry on the Islamic legacy. As Haleema maintains:

'Other religions, which may be on and off or part-time things, like going to church on Sunday or reading the Bible in the mornings, for me Islam is a way of life and it is me in a way because it is my identity. When I walk into a room I see Muslim people I say 'Assalamualaikum' and I'm always conscious 'is my religion going to accept what I'm doing now?' ...the concept of taqwa, always be conscious that God exists and that's why I chose the medical profession because it upholds Islamic values, like caring, honesty, confidentiality, everything that is at the core of Islam is at the core of my career so it's so compatible to me as a Muslim, every step of my life my religion is my criterion' (Haleema).

Likewise, Haleema, comparing and contrasting Islam to Christianity, draws 'on the way of life' concept which Islam prescribes. She claims that Islam is constant in governing her everyday actions. Interestingly, Haleema explains that the medical profession offers her a space where she can practise the inherent principles of Islam without contradictions; indeed, she is given scope by her chosen field of profession to honour concepts such as 'honesty', 'confidentiality' and 'care' which as a Muslim, are 'core' to her beliefs. As such, Haleema's quote illustrates the ways in which her educational aspirations (medical degree) and ultimately, a professional career (medical profession) directly impact on how she generates

her understandings of Islam. Indeed, experiences of educational and work are influencing women's identities and ultimately, they ways in which they manage Muslimness.

'I'm not a proper Muslim...it is to follow the guidelines, the separation of the sexes, to cover yourself, not to eat certain foods or drink, or gambling, I don't gamble but I do drink and I love bacon and I eat chicken that's not halal...I'm not a Muslim because I'm not praying five times a day and I'm not reading the Qur'an, but then recently, I've viewed some of the readings and I kind of agree with a lot of the stuff but then there are other things that make me think I can't be Muslim but then talking to other people, I feel like ok, I am and I do believe but I just don't practise' (Sanaa).

Sanaa, whose father is a religious leader in her community, lives away from home, drinks alcohol and eats pork. Indeed, she expresses her confusion when she suggests that she cannot be Muslim as she does not pray while, at the same time, she recognises that Islamic readings have scope for different understandings. However, despite living a contrasting lifestyle to that prescribed by Islam, Sanaa claims that she does believe in God, hence raising the question of what it means to be Muslim. The diversity of respondents' views around 'meanings' of Islam demonstrate that Muslimness, like all religions, cannot be homogenised or essentialised. The differences in views reflect multiple Islamic identities as participants contest and construct their perceptions of Islam. Next, I briefly look at how women contextualise the meanings they attribute to Islam and hence focus on how and why interpretations of Islam by respondents contribute to the ways in which they manage Muslimness.

5.4.3 Interpreting Islam

In this section, I look at how active participants are critically engaging with the meanings they attribute to Islam. More specifically, I reflect on how they interpret their meanings of religion as they generate diverse understandings and hence, different Islamic practice modes or codes. I began by asking respondents the extent to which they read Quranic scriptures so as to determine how involved they are in understanding and promoting their 'individual' notions of Islam. Most respondents from my study read the Qur'an. From this, however, the majority do not understand Arabic and hence, either read it phonetically (recitations) or read English translations, with the exception of two respondents who understand Arabic. Women give their views on the Qur'an and Islamic law (Shari'a law), thus portraying divergent opinions about Islam. Here, I emphasise that participants take an active interest in Islamic precepts, where being 'Muslim in Britain' denotes a variety of contestations, constructions, affirmations and actions of how Islam is perceived and approached by the women I interviewed. Indeed, Bushra and Sonia talk about the

problematic issue of interpretation, where language, as well as limited knowledge of the Qur'an generates multiple views which may create confusion of what is credible:

'There should only be one way to interpret the Qur'an but because of words, it can be seen in different ways but it should only be in one way. I think it's interpreted in one way but you can say one thing, you can write one sentence but everybody can understand it differently can't they? So that's how problems arise don't they?' (Bushra).

'When we were younger we were reading and we couldn't understand but you need to be aware of what you're reading otherwise why are you doing it? What does it mean? I think there needs to be awareness, knowledge of exactly what you're reading and you're doing for the right reasons, that's really important' (Sonia).

Two respondents, Yasmin and Farha, stress an extremely important discourse about Islam and patriarchy. It is evident from their expressions that a critique of Islam and its 'masculinised' interpretations need to be acknowledged as being divisive; in Yasmin's words, 'isolated':

'I went to an Islamic conference but there was a gap...he asked the question who here is doing medicine and he started having a go, saying girls shouldn't be doing medicine, we should be getting non-Muslims provide for the services for our Muslim community and girls are not thinking about their families and prioritising married life...I just thought you're just making me feel so isolated... I want to be educated and practise as a doctor, and this is not un-Islamic...don't agree to his view at all...I'm going to be a working wife and mother...his Islam was so masculinised, which Islam is not (My emphasis)... it's a fair religion and if you look at the time of the Prophet, his first wife Khadija was his boss, older, first convert to Islam, a successful business woman and she had more money than him probably so how can you tell me that I shouldn't be a doctor?'

I sound like a feminist (Laugh)...but Islam...God is a feminist ...The balance is so unfair at the moment... I hope when I have a daughter that she becomes a scholar who is respected from a classical sense and a modern sense, that she understands her religion inside out, understands why all the male scholars think the way they do... because somebody has to fix this problem...

people tend to forget that the Prophet's wife Aisha was one of the best female scholars and men would go to her to learn...how can this be forgotten? We do need more female scholars to keep the balance and the important thing is that women don't become too ridiculous and go too far to the western model of what feminism is...feminism is not about wanting to be a man, it's about women having their rights and being empowered and that's important for Muslim women to recognise... I don't want to be a man...I just want to be treated fairly' (Yasmin).

Yasmin's concerns about how Islam is 'masculinised' can be linked back to the point made earlier by Fawzia (Chapter Four, page 160) about the ways in which women are categorised due to them adopting certain modes of behaviour; in Fawzia's case, her not wearing the hijab is indicative that she does not pray. Raising issues about patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, Yasmin reflects on her experiences in attending an Islamic conference. According to Yasmin, Muslim women are presently unable to situate themselves within the

broader frameworks of Islamic debates and discussions. Yasmin feels that she is being denied access and right to express her opinions, even within scholarly domains like for instance, conferences. In denouncing that fact, Yasmin wants to reclaim authority, which for her, is granted to her by Islam. The wish expressed is that there should be more female scholars involved in interpreting the Qur'an. Yasmin supports her argument by reverting to the significant role played by historical Muslim female figures such as Khadija and Aisha, Prophet Mohammad's wives, in the evolution of Islamic teachings. These role models were extremely active Muslim women in their communities, but have now been 'forgotten'. Similarly, Brown's study (2006: 417-430) on Muslim women in Britain, in the context of women's rights to education, employment and marriage options, also shows that young women are increasingly using the examples of female historical figures from early Islam, and personal understandings of the hadith and sunna to challenge dominant views held about Islam. Challenging 'cultural baggage', Yasmin maintains that Muslim women should embrace their rights, albeit not to fall into the trap of 'western' feminism. Her understanding of Islamic feminism is informed through her faith, which Yasmin believes provides her with power and agency to interpret Islam in fairness. Indeed, Afshar *et al.*, (2005, 1-31) suggest that the 'British education' that Muslim women are benefiting from is resulting into the latter grasping new knowledge about their faith, hence following the Islamic feminists' 'political and intellectual development' that came about in the past centuries (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Ahmed, 1992, quoted in Afshar *et al.*, 2005: 12).

As I previously argued in Chapter Four, education provides a space and acts as a tool where Muslim women feel empowered to critically reflect upon their faith, and their positionings within the dominant discourses of Islam. This point remains crucial to this thesis. Indeed, as education and ultimately, paid employment, lead women to assert their identities as independent Muslim women, the skills and experiences gained at university and at work may influence respondents' positionings as in how they want to assert their rights as Muslim women, not only within their communities but also within institutions such as marriage. As her quote indicates, Yasmin disagrees with the fact that she was being lectured by a man about marriage, and Muslim women's roles within it. She expresses how important her aims of being educated are so as to later be in a position to work as a medical practitioner. More importantly, her wishes and choices of wanting to be a 'working wife and mother' strongly indicate that Yasmin is challenging existing notions of South Asian Muslim womanhood in Britain so as to re-work a more equitable notion of Muslim woman's status and gender identity within marriage and family life. Indeed, this illustrates how spaces of higher education and employment are impacting on women's gender identities, as well as women's understandings of marriage. Farha, a lawyer, also reflects:

'Like the question of modesty for women in Islam...it is men who've been interpreting these verses and it's not even in the Qur'an...they've taken it from hadiths which some of them have doubtful origins and the Shari'a itself...the development of a legal system which was to administer different areas of the empire and it was developed for that society, Arabian society. It didn't come from the Prophet and it didn't come from God and the Prophet never told anyone to write anything down. And a lot of anti-woman things come from hadiths which are very doubtful because he was so progressive. In his time, women and men used to read namaz (prayer) together' (Farha).

Likewise, Farha expresses her concerns about patriarchal interpretations of Islam, raising the issue of the legitimacy of the hadiths, and the irony of Islamic teachings as being 'progressive' instead of reductive. In addition, Farha stipulates that the concept of Shari'a law was inherently developed to suit particular cultural and political contexts, thereby highlighting its specificity to suit and support particular legal and societal frameworks, more specifically, Arabian society.

Alternatively, some respondents suggest that the Qur'an is fixed and cannot have diverse interpretations, even though Islam is practised differently according to different schools of thought. As Lubaina says:

'We should take the Qur'an as a commitment, it's not to be interpreted, it's the true word of God, we can't go around interpreting the word of God because we believe that all other holy books are a distortion of that over generations, but the Qur'an has stayed the same over all these years. Obviously there are schools of thought and they interpret their own way. But it's the same as long as we have the core meaning of it. The hadith is the Sunna while the Qur'an is the word' (Lubaina).

However, Saeema suggests that in getting more education about Islam and learning Arabic so as to understand the Qur'an, cultural myths can be deconstructed:

'With the Qur'an, all we've ever been taught is how to read it...it's never what it means, you don't understand a word you're reading you assume things but that's not religion but I have started learning about Islam because if anyone had asked me before what religion was I'd just say culture like the old generation, one of the biggest problems is because we're not educated about it...but now when I say yes I'm religious, it's my own interpretation of what I see religion as' (Saeema).

With education, Saeema is able to transcend 'culture' so as to come up with 'my own interpretation' of Islam. However, some respondents see the challenges of this approach. As Nazia says:

'True knowledge is when you question something even though it's completely right sometimes I fear, like you don't question God, but sometimes I fear that my faith in religion is not as strong because I'm questioning and that can move me away from my religion and that's wrong' (Nazia).

Previous research by Abbas (2003: 423) also portrays similar trends, whereby Muslim women criticise their parents' tendencies to read Islam imbued with 'cultural tendencies'.

Nazia goes as far as to maintain that understandings of Islam must be ‘questioned’, even though she personally feels that questioning God is ‘wrong’. In challenging parental interpretations, young women develop different approaches as to how Islam can, and must be understood.

‘It’s manipulating the religion, leave it as original as you can and I do believe that our religion has a large part to do with intention, like the hijab thing, wear it properly, to not want to wear it and just wear it half way and then make a disgrace out of the religion in front of everyone, irritate other people who don’t wear hijab and have to constantly answer questions to fit in with their own people, it just creates problems for everyone. Just take it off and shave your hair, it’s much better’ (Fawzia).

For Fawzia, her Islamic beliefs lead her to suggest that interpretation and intention go hand in hand. For example, for Fawzia, the hijab, instead of acting as a personal choice, becomes an area of contention whereby women who do not wear it wholeheartedly generate debates that ‘confuse’ non-Muslims about why it is worn, and why others do not wear it, hence creating unnecessary polemics about Islamic concepts.

Respondents also talk about certain extreme aspects of Islamic law and assess their validity in the twenty-first century. Indeed, context must not be disregarded as laws must be contextualised and made practical to fit specific cultural and social contexts. In so doing, respondents assess some core concepts of Shari’a law in order to demonstrate their engagements with certain aspects of Islamic law. Farha explains:

‘I have a lot of problems with the Shari’a as a lawyer...all these punishments, these are extreme levels only meant to be used in extreme cases and in the Prophet’s time, they were never used, some of the punishments which are currently in vogue...like they were trying to use them in Afghanistan...like stoning a woman to death...(sigh)...in those times even it was meant to be just to show how bad something was...it was never implemented’ (Farha).

‘It’s not if you steal one thing you get your hands chopped off but if you repetitively steal, and they hardly do that nowadays...it seems like a harsh rule but back in the day maybe it made sense...another example, adultery and stoning to death obviously God put that for a reason, quite a bad sin to commit and it’s becoming so acceptable to do that when it’s a huge major thing, wait till you’re divorced to carry on...the amount of messed up people that walk around, they go to jail, get bailed out but if you had scary laws here, maybe people wouldn’t commit as much crime, quite logical’ (Bushra).

Farha reflects on the fact that stoning to death (punishment for adultery) was just a scare tactic that was not practised in Arabian society, while Bushra maintains that if British society had ‘scary laws’, levels of crime would be lower. Indeed, for her, context is not an issue as she sees the logic of having such deterrents. It is therefore evident that young Muslim women in the UK understand and profess a variety of opinions about Islam,

highlighting the possibilities of taking individualistic stands on religious or theological concepts. Clearly, respondents are challenging ‘what has been taught when we were young’. They hence manifest an awareness to embrace newly discovered views of Islam by attending conferences and talks organised by university union societies and community youth organisations, and by also getting involved in other spheres of media such as Muslim magazines, as well as learning Arabic so that they are able to understand the Qur’an on their own accord. As respondents reflect upon how they engage with Islamic precepts, and the ways in which they decide to practise Islam through their contestations and constructions of Islam, they develop agency and independence in managing Muslimness. Indeed, their contestations and constructions remain linked to the fact that higher education provides them with the necessary space to explore alternative meanings of Islam and therefore, be in a position to develop new gender identities through their navigations.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I focus on how the hijab remains an area of contestation and construction for my participants. Their explorations of hijab as dress code, which is reflective of an Islamic identity, further demonstrate the negotiations respondents are involved in as they navigate notions of Muslimness. Indeed, an analysis of the role which hijab plays in respondents’ contestations and constructions of Islamic identities in Britain remains important to my study as it demonstrates how women are actively engaging with the debates around hijab, religious rights, and multiculturalism in the UK; respondents’ perceptions and experiences of hijab highlight their negotiations and as such, illustrate how educated Muslim women are developing new gender identities through their understandings of Muslim women’s status, agency and choice, within wider discourses of Islam and the hijab.

5.4.4 Unveiling the hijab

‘It is a response to events, a strong symbol...you wear hijab, people know she’s Muslim, there’s no confusion there...they see it. I don’t wear hijab and people don’t see it, they question me ‘What’s your faith?’ ‘You’re not Muslim?’ It’s become quite, not popular, but normal now. For example, my year at university, more than half the girls in my year wear hijab. There’s been quite an increase’ (Asma).

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that clothing plays a definite role in influencing Muslim women’s views on their intersecting multiple identities. In this final section of the chapter, I discuss how the hijab, as Asma states, has become a ‘symbol’ of Islamic identity, whereby women portray agency and choice of whether or not to adopt the hijab as a means to proclaim an Islamic identity in Britain. As such, their decisions to adopt or reject the hijab enable participants to negotiate notions of Muslimness in Britain; in not wearing the hijab, Asma recounts that her Muslimness is ‘not seen’. As Winter (2008: 2) suggests, the hijab

‘sends messages concerning the social and political presence of certain conceptions of Islam’, which encourage diverse reactions about the meanings of hijab from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. More recently, Tarlo (2010), in *Visibly Muslim*, highlights the contours of how Muslims in multicultural Britain are choosing to express their identities and faith through dress, whether they choose to wear colourful hijabs, plain black jilbabs, or niqabs.

Tarlo (2010) argues that issues around Islamic female modesty, faith, fashion and politics remain enmeshed with one another, where ‘Islamic fashion’, generated and accessed through particular retail shops and websites in the UK, provides space for Muslim women to express different styles of hijabs/jilbabs and hence, new spaces to express their identities. Tarlo (2010: 2) states that: meaning (about clothes) is above all about interpretation, is often contested and is always contingent on particular circumstances. She (2010: 13) argues that the multiplicity of ways in which Islamic dress codes are being adopted by Muslim women in Britain reflects ‘how people want to be seen rather than how others define them’. Tarlo (2010: 13) maintains that the ‘category of the visibly Muslim is self-chosen’, which is demonstrative of the fact that women are actively employing agency and action to express the diverse strands of Islamic identities; in choosing to go ‘visibly public’, women adopt Islamic dress codes for various personal reasons which nonetheless, mark them as ‘visibly Muslim’ publicly (Tarlo, 2010: 75). Tarlo’s (2010) study remains relevant to my research as it exemplifies how Islamic dress codes are being negotiated by young Muslim women in order to express and affirm their Islamic identities in Britain.

Similarly, in my study, respondents dress in a variety of ways that spell religious adherence/affiliations in varying degrees. Such nuances depict agency and choice in women consciously choosing how to dress, hence projecting specific messages about ‘Muslimness’ in Britain. Indeed, Lewis’ (2007: 423-441) study, read from post-colonial perspectives and social inclusion debates in Britain, focuses on how dress informs ‘bodies which come to be read as Muslim’. Veiling therefore remains a product of a ‘spatial system’, whereby its uses have evolved historically (Lewis, 2007). Spatialised processes, historically and geographically located, impact on women’s Muslim identities; the ‘veil’ must therefore also be seen as an ‘item of clothing and not just a sign of religious allegiance’. Taking fashion retail as focus, Lewis (2007) addresses the multiplicity of meanings espoused by young women as they choose to adopt any form of Islamic dress style. Perceiving ‘Muslim woman’ with the veil does not therefore automatically suggest that she is oppressed, at the mercy of patriarchal cultures but signifies trendy attitudes to Islamic dress codes, thereby highlighting ‘revivalist’ Islamic identities. As Tarlo (2010: 5) also maintains, to ‘understand the significance of hijab today we need to move beyond debates about whether it is

liberating or oppressive towards a focus both on its form and on the diversity of meanings attributed to it and activities generated around it’.

At the time of interview, the majority of respondents wore jeans and tops (‘English clothes’), five respondents wore jeans, tops and the hijab, one respondent wore the salwar kameez with the hijab, one respondent wore just the salwar kameez while two respondents wore the jilbab with the hijab. In this sample, no respondent wore the burka or the niqab. This said, in my sample, a minority (eight respondents) did wear the hijab, with one respondent wearing it and removing it according to place and space. All participants claim that a woman should have the choice to wear the hijab if she wishes to. Respondents who do not wear the hijab explain that women who do adopt it do it out of ‘strength’, ‘choice’, ‘independence’ or to affirm their Muslim identities.

Concepts around the hijab and female modesty rely on personal and subjective understandings of female modesty in Islam. As Sonia affirms:

‘I’m still covered and I remember reading women have to cover their heads and underneath that line there’s another line saying that men should also cover up so the question is: cover up what?’ (Sonia).

Despite this ‘personal’ facet of modesty in Islam, the hijab today remains a ‘symbol’ spurring political contention. Indeed, the issue of Islamic dress codes has generated some controversies in Europe. For instance, in Britain, the secondary school student Shabina Begum claiming her right to wear the jilbab at school (June 2004), and the school teacher assistant Aishah Azmi demanding her right to wear the niqab during lessons in Britain (October 2006) reflect that young British Muslim women are expecting that their religious convictions be recognised and accommodated within British educational establishments. In France, the ban on headscarves in public (March 2004) and more recently, the burka ban (2010) in French public spaces have also raised considerable debates about the rights of Muslims to express their religious beliefs in European contexts. The veil has therefore generated debates about the political position of Muslims in Europe, the demand for religious rights in being able to freely practise one’s religious beliefs (here female modesty) and women’s rights to choice (to adopt the hijab), as members and citizens of democratic states. Nonetheless, counter arguments about the veil suggest that it epitomises the symbol of women’s oppression. I therefore asked participants about their views on the hijab and why they think young women are increasingly adopting the hijab on university campuses and workplaces in Britain.

‘I’ve done it after these political events as well...I think it’s in part for religious reasons, the way I was taught to wear the hijab ‘oh just cover your head cause you have reached a certain age now’ and you started high school, cover your head...I

didn't start off from a religious perspective, Islam says 'you have to cover your head now, wear the hijab'' (Nazia).

For some respondents, the hijab is adopted and used to affirm a Muslim identity following 'political' events. Nazia differentiates between the cultural, religious and political perspectives that wearing the hijab entails. Indeed, being told to wear it by her Pakistani parents was purely from a South Asian cultural perspective, while wearing it out of choice after September 11 denotes a political statement of an Islamic identity, hence demarcating a shift in Nazia's values. As Haleema and Yasmin suggest, awareness about Islam has been raised positively by young British Muslims, who are constructing new views and understandings of their faith:

'For something new to happen there's always a trigger for it so September 11 was certainly the trigger for it and more and more Muslims are converting to Islam because it's made people think and made people go read the literature, triggered a thought-process so I think that's the reason why Muslim women are taking up the hijab' (Haleema).

'A lot of people who maybe were a bit more liberal have had to question their faith and think well I do have a name that sounds Muslim and I have some beliefs but why am I having so much grief about it? So from my experience and knowing people, they've had to go back and look at their faith with a more critical eye and people have actually found more sense in it and say oh well I should take it seriously and if I'm gonna do it, I might as well do it properly then and I think that's why you find more girls wearing the headscarf' (Yasmin).

Indeed, the choice to wear the hijab demonstrates, as Afshar *et al.*, (2005: 29) claim, is a 'political act' resuming in an act of resistance on the part of young women, which is reflective of 'political Islamism' (Ali, 1992: 114). In fact, far from depicting the picture of the modestly dressed Muslim girl, the hijab becomes a representation of an Islamic symbol used to publicly affirm a politicised religious identity, an approach that young women find liberating and empowering. Alia suggests that the veil has been brought into the limelight by comments made by MP Jack Straw who stated: the niqab is a visible statement of separation and of difference (*BBC News Online* October 2006).

'Definitely to do more with identity rather than a clash...I mean when women were wearing veils long before any of this politics that came into it...you know when Jack Straw made his comment about veils, it's not that it separates but it's showing who you are' (Alia).

However, Alia, who does not wear the hijab, disagrees and thinks that Muslim women are not concerned about 'separating' themselves from the rest of society, but are portraying an Islamic identity by making it visible through the hijab. Likewise, Farha sees it as a minority in a 'western' context, which feels 'threatened' and hence, feels the need to

state their differences publicly. In so doing, they affirm independence and choice, defending their decisions to wear the veil:

'So many young women here do it as a symbol of identity and a symbol of independence...trying to say that they are different from the rest of Western society, like trying to prove something and I think people become more fanatical about their beliefs when they're a minority and it's much more relaxed when you're actually not threatened. So they try and preserve their identity by being a bit extreme. That's what's happening here, saying that they're Muslims and they are different' (Farha).

Sadia, who does not wear the hijab, respects her 'educated' friends who decide to wear it out of 'personal choice'; the hijab is not about oppression but an *affirmation* of a Muslim identity post September 9/11, where being Muslim means being in 'a category':

'I think it is an identity thing...and especially after the whole September 11 thing...the whole thing saying actually we are Muslims, we are proud and we can wear the hijab and I think for people who want to do it, fair play to them...some people are covered up and not allowed out of the house but I think a lot of young women, educated, they do it out of personal belief, out of choice and that would be independence as opposed to being oppressed... the girls I know who wear hijab...their reasoning behind them is completely independence

*They want to do it as they believe in it so I don't think anyone has any right to criticise...it's another form of dress...again it's public perception and the media hype surrounding it...same with the Sikh turban or Jewish cross, one minute people put you in a category, like British Muslim, and the next minute decategorise then where's the sense in that? **How can you tell us not to be who we want to be?**' (Sadia). (Sadia's emphasis)*

Forcefully, Sadia denounces public perception as well as the role of the media, and maintains that Muslims in Britain should have the 'right' to an autonomous decision of deciding 'who we want to be' by adopting 'another form of dress'. Tarlo's (2010: 46-47) study suggests that how the hijab is perceived by different individuals, Muslims and non-Muslims, 'shape and control' the meanings associated with hijab; 'such meanings are in turn constantly re-framed by on-going political events and sensational media coverage of these' (Tarlo, 2010: 46). Indeed, this reflects the inter-link between hijab, politics and identity. Furthermore, contrasting the hijab to the Sikh turban and the Jewish cross, Sadia stresses how easy it is to 'categorise' and 'decategorise' identities. However, Sabina highlights the stigma that comes with the hijab, especially after September 9/11, where women who wear the hijab are demonised as potential threats to British society:

'You think head scarves you think she's Muslim, she's got a scarf on so she's probably got a gun underneath! So you cross to the other side of the road... Although I don't wear the hijab, after September 11, you walk down the street and you think 'My God, people are looking at me' (Sabina).

As a reaction to such issues, Mushirah, in wearing her hijab, hopes to break stereotypes about Muslim women, hence creating a more positive image of women who wear the hijab:

'I'm not scum, and I want people to see that, it's a mission, to be a good representative and if anybody starts to do that well it's purely because they want to reaffirm their Islam, we are really tired of defending ourselves, it's everyday life like from people thinking you can't speak English properly cause you're wearing a headscarf to opportunities that get missed because you wear it' (Mushirah).

Nevertheless, some respondents, who do not wear the hijab, criticise the stereotypes associated with women who choose to adopt the hijab as dress code. Indeed, women in my study raise issues around the hijab and gendered conceptions of Muslimness by challenging the notion of 'she wears the hijab so she's a good girl'. The hijab is used by women to gain freedom and project particular images of themselves, whilst not necessarily adhering to Islamic values. The adoption of the hijab, hence, does not necessarily suggest increased piety, but outlines religiosity through the visual representation of a publicly articulated Islamic identity. Rubina's and Zainab's concerns about girls wearing the hijab whilst having 'boyfriends' and 'casual sex' beg the question: Does wearing the hijab make you more Muslim than I am?

'You need to watch out for those who wear the scarf, they're not innocent, in any sense of the word they're not, I thought they were until I went to college and the girls in scarves do the worst things, people think they're innocent as they wear scarves and I'm like 'No', she's the one with the boyfriend and gets up to loads of things, they use it like that' (Rubina).

'I don't disagree with anybody wearing it but some people wear the hijab but they are going out and having casual sex' (Zainab).

Nuzranah, who views herself as a 'practising Muslim', recounts her experiences at university, where her not wearing the hijab sends the message that she is not Muslim:

'One of the girls asked me, at the Islamic society, 'are you Muslim?' and I said yes and she said 'I thought you were Sikh' and I said 'why' and she said 'you don't act very Muslim as you don't wear a scarf' and I was like 'believe it or not I do pray and I don't have a boyfriend' and so in a way, I felt like I didn't belong to the Muslim society here on campus' (Nuzranah).

The challenges faced by women like Nuzranah to profess a Muslim identity in Muslim societies at university, without a hijab on, proves to be problematic. In fact, Dwyer's work (1999) focuses on the ways in which the hijab frames the construction of young women's Muslim identities through the diverse meanings which the hijab conveys. In the context of hijab and its meanings around sexual propriety, religiosity and purity, Dwyer (1999: 18) maintains that from her study, 'the identities of those who did not wear the hijab were constructed in opposition to these meanings'; in effect, women who wore the hijab were

automatically perceived as respecting the ethos of sexual modesty and religiosity, as opposed to women who did not wear the hijab. These findings epitomise Nuzranah's concerns that in choosing not to adopt the hijab, the perceptions she projects do not depict her as someone who prays, but as someone who probably has a boyfriend. Moreover, Fawzia expresses her frustration at women who wear the hijab while smoking shisha and meeting guys at university:

'Sometimes I think I'm better than them because I don't drink and I don't do shisha but the main thing is not drinking cause a lot of people don't do the drinking, it's the shisha thing...the hijabis, they're sitting there with cake of make-up on and a really tight scarf which exposes their entire neck and cleavage ...I'm being seen as less modest because I'm not wearing a scarf and you, I can see every bit of your body right now and they're sitting there snuggled next to a guy having shisha-where's the modesty?' (Fawzia)

For Fawzia, the concept of female modesty is not signified through the hijab but through behaviour. In this study, some respondents not wearing the hijab have expressed concerns about those who wear the hijab with 'skinny jeans and leggings', hence defeating the purpose of not attracting attention from the opposite sex. This issue of modesty is discussed by Tarlo (2010: 40-41), who suggests that as women experiment by blending clothes they consider to be 'fashionable', the 'Muslim looks' adopted by young British Muslim women do not only rely on issues of modesty as prescribed by Islam. In fact, their notions of dressing religiously also remain embedded within the use of colours, textures and patterns which have 'Islamic resonance' as well as 'cosmopolitan sensibilities'. Nevertheless, like Fawzia, Sabina does not want to wear the hijab as she wears 'skin tight' jeans. Her choice not to wear a headscarf is informed by how she interprets the meanings of 'purdah' (the practice of ensuring the separation of women and men):

'I could wear a scarf, but again, I could wear skin tight jeans. And in those jeans there is no point in that kind of purdah, it's not respect is it?' (Sabina).

For Sabina, the hijab signifies just that: purdah, which is embedded within how she views the concept of modesty in Islam. Her thoughts are further echoed by Rubina, who also chose not to wear the hijab due to her adoption of jeans and tight tops. Rubina is exasperated at the fact that some Muslim women wear see-through jilbabs, therefore revealing more flesh than she does in wearing clothes, albeit jeans and tops:

'I understand you need not show parts of your body but everything will show off the shape of your body, I mean this one girl, she was wearing a jilbab and I'm thinking to myself I can see her underwear, she was wearing blue knickers and her jilbab was white! And the sunlight shown proper, see-through, and she wasn't wearing any clothes and I'm thinking 'what are you doing?!' She's wearing a jilbab but I'm wearing clothes! I'm the one covering!' (Rubina).

Discourses around what constitutes female modesty for young women hence differ; for some, modesty is about literally adopting an Islamic dress code (hijab, jilbab) irrespective of material and colour, while for others, modesty is contextual and ‘relative’, where one adapts to one’s current social climate. As Farha maintains:

‘Modesty, it’s all relative to the society where you live because let’s say, in Pakistan, if I’m going out and I’m wearing a salwar kameez, or a top and jeans or something, I’d be quite modestly dressed. The duppata is a big thing there, so I may have a scarf around my neck and that would be fine, but my hair being covered or not, it’s really not an issue, because nobody thinks that’s indecent and nobody is going to stare at me because my hair is uncovered’ (Farha).

Indeed, denouncing women who wear the hijab as fashion statement, Aisha, who wears the jilbab, suggests that non-Muslims get mixed messages when Muslim women wear the hijab while going clubbing. For her, this is unacceptable:

‘Some wear it as fashion statement and there are people who have taken the hijab off at university. I don’t blame people for questioning, she wears the hijab and she doesn’t and people are confused but it makes people more aware of the religion, people are going to ask you why do you wear it? And that’s your chance to actually say why you wear it...you can’t just well go clubbing and so on and it’s really embarrassing, someone said I see girls wearing shorts and the hijab and that’s shocking, and he’s like are you just supposed to cover your hair?’ (Aisha)

As her words indicate, it is clear that her response raises the question: what does it really mean to be Muslim in Britain? Young educated Muslim women in the UK are therefore actively generating new meanings, interpretations and understandings of Islamic dress codes; defining ‘new’ traditions in spatial modernities inform their choices and lifestyles. As some of them decide to wear ‘shorts and the hijab’, meanings of Muslimness remain acutely contested and constructed by Muslim women. As my study reveals, respondents are deciphering meanings of the hijab and other Islamic dress codes such as the jilbab as they explore educational or work settings. As respondents’ perceptions indicate, the hijab has become a key contested signifier of Islamic identity on campus as women decide whether or not to adopt it at university, and hence choose to publicly manifest an Islamic identity, which Tarlo (2010) would identify as being ‘visibly Muslim’.

From my research, it is evident that respondents who do not adopt the hijab are often viewed as being non-Muslim due to them not wearing a headscarf, as exemplified by Nuzranah (quoted above). Also, some respondents, like Rubina, who chooses not to wear the hijab and others who do wear the hijab, like Aisha, engage with discourses around female modesty in Islam so as to contest notions around how and why the hijab is being worn by Muslim women in Britain today. Indeed, Rubina critiques the fact that the hijab is being worn with ‘blue knickers underneath a see-through white jilbab’, whilst Aisha

maintains that the hijab, if worn as ‘fashion statement’ with ‘shorts’, sends mixed signals to non-Muslims about the concept of hijab in Islam. As respondents reflect on their diverse positionings on this issue of hijab, it is glaring that they are generating new gender identities as they negotiate Islamic concepts around dress codes and decide how to navigate the notion of hijab. Indeed, their negotiations of hijab illustrate the ways in which they manage Muslimness as they explore educational and work settings. Such explorations and negotiations might be important for these women at a later stage of their educational and professional careers as they decide to go into employment in the future. Indeed, deciding whether to manifest ‘public’ Islamic identities through hijab within the workplace may be yet another interesting area of research leading to an understanding of how women’s gender identities evolve as they negotiate Islam in Britain.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on how British South Asian Muslim women contest and construct their identities in the context of their daily social experiences of higher education and work. It extended the themes around Muslim women’s evolving gendered identities, which I developed in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I looked at how the experiences of higher education and work are opening up questions about identity in new ways for Muslim women as they evaluate their own gendered identities, and the possible impacts this process may have on their future life options. Indeed, as they reshape their identities and become assertive in affirming these identities, respondents ultimately develop new attitudes towards the meanings they attribute to marriage. Through my theoretical focus on how identities are ‘defined’ and ‘affirmed’ by respondents within contextual processes of *expression* and *performance*, I have developed an analysis which has explored the ways in which research participants ‘negotiate’ and manage Muslimness. More specifically, I argued that their ‘Muslimness’ is informed through relational boundaries, where religious identities are perceived through racialised, ethnic, citizenship and gendered lenses. In navigating amongst citizenship, ethnic and religious boundaries, respondents depict fluid, contextual and subjective portrayals of their gender identities. Hence, ideas of Muslimness are constantly being challenged, constructed and framed by young South Asian Muslim women in Britain. Through such a dynamic process of negotiation, I have stressed that Muslimness is constantly contested and constructed through an axis of racialised, ethnic and national boundaries. In this analysis, I have illustrated that ambivalence in answering the question ‘who am I and why?’ has demonstrated that boundaries of identification for respondents remain extremely flexible, hence deconstructing the notion of fixed categories when it comes to the ‘definition’ and ‘affirmation’ of identities.

First, I focused on how respondents choose to *express* their identities (by definition) by looking at the terms (for example, 'Asian', 'Muslim', 'British', or all of these) they use to do so. Through this analysis, I have shown that their 'processes of identification' indicate intergenerational differences in the ways in which identities are affirmed among South Asian Muslims, as young women demonstrate agency in deciding which identity to prioritise, which one to embrace or which one to reject. Indeed, my study indicates that most women employ hyphenated or hybrid terms (for example 'British Pakistani', 'British Muslim') to define themselves, hence indicating the amount of choice they have in 'expressing' their identities. While some respondents identify with citizenship and ethnic heritage, others prefer to affix their citizenship and religious identities. Also, as participants navigate their ethnic, religious and citizenship identities, they critically engage with discourses encompassing notions of 'Britishness', 'whiteness' and 'Englishness', and what it implies to be 'British' and 'non-white' within the wider context of multicultural British society. Through my discussions with them, it is obvious that respondents remain aware of how racialised and politicised discourses around South Asian Muslim identities in Britain influence the ways in which they reflect on their identities. More importantly, it is also evident that participants, through their negotiations of such discourses, are asserting new gender identities within the spaces (higher education/work) in which they evolve.

Moreover, as respondents explore educational and work settings, they underline how 'public perception', through 'labels and stereotypes' considerably influences the ways in which they construct their gender identities. As respondents negotiate different spaces and encounter people from diverse backgrounds at university, their accounts highlight inclusionary and exclusionary debates about how differences in skin colour, accents and dress may lead to their identities being essentialised. In fact, they explain how dress codes act as significant markers of identities within spaces such as university and work. As young women reiterate their feelings about the ways in which dress codes (salwar kameez, hijab or jilbab) aid to attribute 'stereotypical' notions around their ethnic, religious or citizenship identities, their encounters at university lead them to re-negotiate their use of clothing which, in respondents' social contexts, convey meanings about respondents' positionings. For instance, although respondents' experiences of negotiating identities demonstrate that navigating boundaries is not a straight-forward process, some participants maintain that wearing jeans may signify 'British' while salwar kameez may indicate 'Asian'. Engaging with these dichotomies is in effect leading young women to critically reflect on how they construct and articulate their identities through clothing. Indeed, through their re-workings of identities through dress codes, participants are exploring new gendered identities as they strategically employ dress codes to signify particular strands of their gender identities.

Second, I extended this discussion of respondents' definition of identities by looking at how they choose to *perform* (by affirmation) their identities. In this section, I focused on how participants affirm their gender identities through this notion of *performance*, which conveys choice and agency as women navigate their social contexts so as to perform particular aspects of their identities. In particular, I addressed the ways in which respondents are maintaining cultural and religious identities through practices such as weddings, traditions such as language and food, and events such as Ramadan and Eid. In fact, many respondents indicate that maintaining South Asian cultural and religious traditions remains important to them, and intend to carry them on through to the next generation. More importantly, from this analysis, it is apparent that even though participants are ready to maintain cultural customary practices, nevertheless, they make a clear distinction between what they perceive as 'religion' and 'culture' and hence, depict intergenerational changes in the ways identities are understood and ultimately, performed within British South Asian Muslim communities. For example, in discussing the impact communities have on women's modes of behaviour (social activities/ dress codes), as well as reflecting on how weddings and marriage operate within British South Asian Muslim communities, some respondents demonstrate that they exercise choice, control and agency in navigating 'religious' and 'cultural' boundaries because of the independence gained from education. Indeed, as respondents make this important distinction between 'religion' and 'culture', young women are re-negotiating their perceptions of gender identities by formulating new understandings of what ethnic and religious traditions entail; as such, this indicates an evolution in Muslim women's gender identities.

Third, I explored how respondents manage Muslimness in the ways in which respondents understand, interpret and frame Islam within the context of multicultural British society. It is evident that for the majority of my participants, religious identity is given more priority than ethnic and citizenship identity, although the latter are acknowledged as being invariably intertwined with their religious identities. Nevertheless, such prioritisation indicates the possibilities of emerging Islamic identities through the usage of the term 'British Muslim', as well as through the adoption of the hijab by educated Muslim women in the UK. As respondents grapple with discourses of 'what it means to be British Muslim', young women are evaluating their Islamic identities at university and work. For example, as they manage Muslimness, women indicate acute agency in how they understand issues around female modesty in Islam, a process which undoubtedly raises debates about what the hijab signifies for these young women. Indeed, the hijab becomes a key contested signifier of Islamic identity within spaces such as the university campus. For instance, for Abida, her hijab 'is' her 'Muslimness', although she wears jeans simultaneously, whilst for Sabina, not

wearing the hijab is how she expresses her 'respect' for Islam as she highlights the inappropriateness of wearing the hijab with jeans. Respondents portray an array of views, out of which it is clear that the hijab has come to signify a 'visual' representation of one's Islamic identity; so much so that as some respondents reiterate, not wearing headscarves leads fellow students to assume that they are not Muslims, but are from non-Muslim South Asian backgrounds.

These issues have raised debates about the meanings of Muslimness for young British South Asian Muslim women, as well as indicated that Muslim women in Britain are increasingly critiquing the ways in which Islam must be understood, approached and interpreted, hence generating highly individualistic notions of Muslimness. As such, through their negotiations of higher education and work, respondents indicate that they are generating new gender identities as they contest and construct Muslimness within these new spaces. In essence, the last part of this discussion has reinforced that Muslimness cannot be 'assumed' to be a fixed category, but must be seen as a relational and contextual notion informing young women's daily lives. As respondents experience new settings such as higher education and work, they generate spaces to contest and construct new gender identities which influence other life options, such as marriage. In the following chapter, I explore questions around the contingent notions of Muslimness, with a particular focus on how British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities are experienced through marriage and Islam.

CHAPTER SIX

Framing marriage: the British South Asian Muslim context

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore how British South Asian Muslim women navigate and re-negotiate the institution, the practice and the act of marriage in Britain. I argue that through the spaces of higher education and employment, respondents are generating new understandings of marriage and as such, develop new gendered identities. Through this analysis, I focus on how respondents frame marriage through negotiation processes which help them explore boundaries in marriage and in so doing, generate new gendered relationships. Here, I use the term ‘frame’ as it demonstrates that Muslim women are critically and intentionally setting boundaries to satisfy their ‘Islamic’ and ‘Western’ ideals of how and why they understand marriage as they do. This chapter extends the theme of negotiation of identities I introduced in Chapter Four. Ultimately, in this chapter, I reveal the ways in which religious identity impacts on participants as they navigate ideals of marriage.

I focus on marriage as an institution, practice and act, where these remain tied by the gender relationships within them. As I reiterated in Chapter Two, feminists have highlighted the subordination of women to men in spaces such as the home (Oakley, 1974) and the labour market (Walby; 1997; Adkins, 1995). For the purpose of my study, I focus specifically, here, on how feminists have theorised gender relationships within marriage. Existing feminist literature on marriage and gender relations have reinforced the inferior position and subordination of the wife to her husband within matrimony, which is both a public (social institution) and a private (personal relationship) institution. As Dryden (1999: 9) puts it ‘marriage is a socially organised institution that is fundamentally about gender, and gender relations in this society are not currently equal’. Tracing the historical, political and legal status of a wife in the ‘marriage contract’, Pateman’s *Sexual Contract* (1988) exposed the unequal gender relationship between spouses where wives, rendered economically dependent on husbands, are ‘owned’ and enslaved sexually, by the latter within a system supported by patriarchy. Others, like Delphy and Leonard (1992) have illustrated gender inequalities within the household by looking at how wives’ ‘unpaid labour’, characterised by childcare and domestic work at home, undermines equal gender relationships between spouses within the family unit. Nevertheless, as wives acquire economic independence, they also face the ‘second shift’ as they shoulder dual responsibilities at work and at home (Hochschild, 1989). By this, Hochschild (1989)

indicates how working mothers, after a day's work out of the home, come home to face more work (housework, children's care), hence the 'second shift'. In this chapter, I endeavour to uncover respondents' attitudes towards the institution of marriage, the responsibilities that come with it, as well as the equal gender relationships they hope to achieve as they express their expectations of marriage.

In relation to South Asian Muslim marriages in the UK, as I illustrated in the literature review (Chapter Two), researchers (Bisit, 1997; Bradby, 1999; Werbner, 2004; Charsley and Shaw, 2006) have outlined the religious and cultural significance attributed to marriage. Writing on gender and patriarchy in the South Asian household, Bhopal (1997: 4) states "Asian women may be oppressed in the family, by the form of marriage they participate in". In particular, Bhopal (1997) highlights the customary practice of the arranged marriage as being a site of patriarchal oppression for women. Furthermore, in conjunction with arranged matches, the occurrence of forced marriages remits into question women's rights to 'free choice' in marriage (*Times Online*, 2005). In the light of such debates, I analyse respondents' dispositions towards these practices as young women produce their own narratives of what 'choice' in marriage entails. As far as the legality of marriage is concerned for South Asian Muslims in Britain, research by Pearl and Menski (1998) has shown that British Muslims negotiate two legal systems in matters of marriage and divorce by navigating Islamic and English law. This concept is epitomised through the 'Angrezi (English) Shari'a law', which is a fusion of both laws. Nonetheless, as respondents navigate Islamic marriage in Britain, it also implies that talaq (divorce by female repudiation) and polygamy, although illegal in English jurisprudence, remain a concern for Muslim women as these are part of the legal fabric constituting marriage laws in Shari'a law.

I develop my argument by focusing on marriage on three levels. First, I argue that marriage is a significant institution in South Asian communities but it is undergoing change as women have scope to negotiate constructions and contestations of marriage. As the institution of marriage in twenty-first century Britain, a European context, evolves, Muslim women's attitudes towards marriage, as well as gendered marital expectations ultimately alter. My analysis illustrates how respondents produce diverse meanings of marriage as compared to their parents, thereby creating intergenerational differences which influence the institution of marriage. Through this process, I also demonstrate that Muslim women set themselves apart from mainstream British society; they see themselves as different from non-Muslim society and through this discourse of difference, I highlight how participants generate individual and contextual meanings of marriage.

Second, I consider the process where Muslim women re-negotiate the *practice* of marriage. By ‘practice’, I refer to the marital gender relationship respondents hope to achieve with future husbands as they navigate to transform expected gendered norms which are embedded in cultural and religious ideals set by their communities. In particular, on a first level, I examine women’s negotiations of pre-marital relationships as they review gendered boundaries of appropriate modes of behaviour, which South Asian Muslim womanhood is expected to uphold prior to marriage. On a second level, I assess how ‘new’ gendered expectations of marriage on the part of respondents influences marital relationships as women demand equality in the household; specifically, I evaluate women’s responses to domestic work and their living arrangements. Through this analysis, I illustrate the struggles unmarried women may face as they attempt to challenge fixed gendered roles in marriage. Indeed, by looking at married respondents’ experiences of marriage, it is possible to compare unmarried respondents’ marital expectations to married women’s marital realities. On a third level, I demonstrate how women are negotiating ‘choice’ of marriage partners; I precisely reflect on customary practices such as ‘arranged’ and ‘forced’ marriages, where the difficulty of making a clear distinction between them highlights the problematic issue of consent in marriages arranged by families. I also extend the theme of arranged marriage by briefly reviewing women’s perceptions of cousin and transnational marriages. Here, I want to stress that these levels of analysis remain inter-related as the practice of marriage is constantly negotiated through respondents’ agency to effectively challenge and construct new gendered identities in marriage.

Third, I look at how the *act* of marriage, which signifies the style of ceremony respondents adopt, remains a marker which women utilise to further negotiate, and frame ‘Islamic marriage’ in Britain. In fact, in navigating ‘nikah’ and ‘registry’, the focus placed on the ceremony becomes a symbol of other negotiations involved in the marriage process. For instance, on one level, I analyse how respondents navigate Islamic law and English law as they consider marriage as Muslims, as well as British citizens. On a second level, I focus on women’s negotiations of the nikah’s stipulations from Shari’a law; I argue that respondents are aiming for a discourse of gender equality within the Islamic marriage as they contest talaq and polygamy, Islamic principles essentially deemed to be patriarchal in nature by feminists. In essence, I aim to show whether British South Asian Muslim women are re-working Islamic ideals of marriage by actively evaluating the possibilities and the limitations of such negotiations. Indeed, does the nikah truly provide women with scopes to contest patriarchy so as to safeguard gender equality in marriage? As young women navigate educational and employment spaces, do their negotiations influence the ways in which they understand marriage and gendered marital roles?

At the time of interview, twenty three respondents were single; one respondent was engaged twice and another engaged once but they both broke off their engagements. One respondent was engaged and one respondent was in a relationship. Five respondents were married, two of whom had transnational marriages to Pakistani nationals. Out of the five married respondents, four women were in their late 20s (28-30 years of age) and one respondent was 26 years old. Four of them married after their university education and were already in full-time employment at the time of their marriage, except for one respondent, who married and was expecting a child whilst still in medical school. Indeed, my research sample demonstrates that women prefer gaining educational qualifications and job prospects before thinking about marriage; they are pushing the gendered expectations (from communities and families) that they should marry in their early twenties. 'Sorting out a career first (before marriage)' is a common wish and strategy of the women I interviewed, hence explaining why the majority of young women in this research were not married at the time of interview.

6.2 MARRIAGE AS INSTITUTION

Researchers have shown how marriage, as an institution, has lost popularity in the Western world. Clulow and Mattinson (1989: 4) argue that the institution of marriage has now become a 'private' act where the meaning of marriage as an institution is 'privatised'. Consequently, the focus shifts from marriage being seen as a public institution (social) to become a more 'private' relationship between wives and husbands based on 'romantic love' (personal) (Gillis, 1986). The dichotomy public versus private has influenced the foundation of the marital institution whereby couples seemingly benefit from more agency and individuality to 'define' marriage in the contemporary world; cohabitation as a precursor or alternative to marriage is one of the factors threatening marriage as an institution as more people opt to cohabit rather than marry (Wilson *et al.*, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Haskey, 2001). Nevertheless, even though the foundation of marriage is increasingly declining, the institution under state law in Britain is still recognised and validated through a legal contract, a document which has often been described by respondents in my research as 'a piece of paper'. For them, this 'piece of paper' outlines a more public and formal definition of marriage as opposed to the relationship between married partners, hence further reinforcing the notion of marriage as separately epitomising on one level, an institutional/legal sphere and on a second level, the gender relationship which exists between married couples.

In this section, I investigate whether respondents consider marriage to be an 'important' institution in British Muslim communities. As Basit (1997: 72) maintains, the

institution of marriage in Islam is viewed as a “fundamental unit in Muslim society”, where defined gendered roles of the wife as a homemaker and husband as the breadwinner remain the Islamic precepts which Muslim wives and husbands must aspire to achieve in their marriages. Relying on this hypothesis, I examine whether women feel that marriage, as an institution, remains a primordial concern for both Muslim women and men in their communities; this will throw light on the extent to which marriage is valued in their communities. Specifically, I ask if this has changed for this group of women in further education.

6.2.1 ‘It’s just a piece of paper for them’: British South Asian Muslim women’s perceptions of marriage in Britain

The majority of respondents highlight that marriage has undergone huge transformations as an institution in the UK. However, my research shows that marriage in the lives of young British South Asian Muslims in Britain remains a fundamental institution forming the basis of their communities. A common theme which also emanates from my findings is that respondents think that marriage has entirely different meanings for non-Muslims and non-Asians in British society; specifically they refer to white British society to demonstrate the opposing values held by each group. According to respondents, marriage has become ‘trivial’ in British society as increasingly, relationships do not necessarily culminate in marriage and divorce makes it easier for people to get out of marriage. Cohabitation before marriage is also perceived as an alternative and acceptable route to marriage, hence creating more options for non-Muslims.

For Sabina, ‘westerners’, meaning people who are not of South Asian descent in Britain, regard marriage as an institution which ‘ties down’ individuals:

‘Westerners, like non-Asians, think that once they’re married, they’re tied down but that isn’t always a bad thing because they’ve made the commitment. But there’s no stigma attached to divorce for them. I think there still is in the Asian community for Muslims, like you’ll be blamed and looked down upon but for Westerners they get out of it easily while we make more effort’ (Sabina).

Sabina reflects on how ‘westerners’ do not face ‘stigma’ in cases of marital breakdown. Subtly, this demonstrates that the institution of marriage in her community still maintains rigid boundaries over how individuals value marriage. She condemns, nevertheless, the negative approach that South Asian communities have in relation to divorce, whereby the stigma associated with being divorced leads them to work through difficulties rather than face vilification from their communities.

'There's a new trend and because people are rushing into things, divorce rates are higher...there's more people getting separated so marriage is not what it used to be, not for non-Asians anyway' (Alia).

'Before marriage was essential, a normal part of life whereas now, it's not that fundamental in British society, if you get married fine, if not, that's ok too...and divorce as well, with people getting married so many times but for British Asians it's still an important part of your lifestyle just because the way our society is but for others, it's not' (Bushra).

As Alia and Bushra suggest, marriage has become optional in British society. They explain the shift by mentioning that divorce rates are getting higher, hence creating chances for people to re-marry and 'trivialising' the concept of marriage as a result. Comparing the differences within ethnic groups, young women obviously indicate the significance that marriage still has in their communities. This therefore ensures that South Asians in Britain will ultimately contemplate marriage; for them, marriage seems to be a necessity, and not an option.

'My friend, like she is not Asian, got pregnant at 19 and she doesn't want the marriage thing but wants to find the right person to support her and that's what people look for now, it's more about you connect with someone and then it's more a relationship, more romantic as opposed to the practicality of marriage...it's sad because it takes away the sanctity of marriage and because of that, they don't have any restriction on pre-marital sex' (Fawzia).

'I think it's not the same pressure it used to be...you meet somebody and you're supposed to get married and then live with him as opposed to now, everybody lives together before, it's the relationship focus, not marriage, that's western society' (Sadia).

Fawzia and Sadia raise the point that 'relationship' and 'marriage' are two separate and distinctive phenomenon nowadays. Indeed, people in Britain are more concerned with building up 'romantic' relationships (couple based) as opposed to the formal institutionalisation of two people being legally tied into one entity which is recognised by the state. Furthermore, as Sadia suggests, in 'western society', more effort is put on the individual rather than the social aspects of a couple deciding to share a life together. Fawzia and Sadia consider pre-marital sexual relationships, as well as having children out of wedlock as not being issues considered taboo in contemporary British society, hence leading to the question of whether marriage is still needed. However for Haleema, the erosion of marriage as a viable concept explains the 'break down' of British society:

'I think marriage is so important in upholding a stable society and British society is breaking down because this concept of marriage is not there anymore, the family values are eroding, especially among the non-Asian, white, Caucasian, there are so many problems like teenage pregnancy and single-parent families... all because marriage as an institution is being lost and it is wrong' (Haleema).

Critiquing the issues such as teenage pregnancy and single parenthood, Haleema strongly believes that marriage is what contributes to the stability of society. More importantly, the quotes from Fatimah and Shazia below reveal that young women believe that the shift to secularism in Britain explains why marriage is no longer regarded as important. Indeed, Islam promotes marriage and condemns pre-marital sexual relationships, hence explaining why young South Asian Muslims in Britain differentiate between themselves and ‘white, Caucasians’, as Haleema put it.

‘In the UK, it’s the lack of belief...marriage in Islam is a big part and if you’re not married, you’re missing out so that’s the difference’ (Fatimah).

The ‘lack of belief’, uttered by Fatimah, further underlines the religious aspect attributed to marriage by respondents; marriage is for them a religious institution, more so than a social institution, or even a legal institution which stipulates contractual terms, as Shazia below reinforces, ‘like signing a piece of paper’:

‘In the white community, everyone is getting on because Britain is affected as they are not really into religion. To a lot of them it’s just like signing a paper, one of my friends’ parents, they’re married and they wanted her to get married but then she wasn’t that religious, so she just started living with her boyfriend. Obviously her parents, Catholics, said ‘You have to get married’ but she’s like ‘No, it’s just a piece of paper’. So different for the younger generation...and they’re just living happily now so it’s possible, it’s common. I think marriage came from religion but they’re getting away from religion and they have kids out of marriage. But with Asians, the educated people, they’re in their studies, but marriage is still involved in their life’ (Shazia).

Making a stark comparison between ‘non-Asians’ and ‘Asians’, Shazia reinforces that for the Muslim community, marriage remains inextricably linked to religion, where having children out of wedlock is not envisaged by any Muslim, not even ‘educated’ ones. Hence, for some respondents, marriage as ‘sacred’ institution is no longer evident in non-Muslim British society. Historically, marriage in the west, a Christian sacrament, relied on the consent of couples to live together, whereby vows were made contractual by authority of the Church (Ingram, 1981; Goody, 1983; Mansfield and Collard, 1998). Nowadays, as Shazia suggests, the younger generations in Britain do not perceive the ‘sanctity’ of marriage to be significant. The evolution of the perception of marriage from religious to secular institution bound by the laws of the state, not only depicts the dynamic nature of the perception of marriage, but also portrays that generational changes influence how younger generations negotiate the idea of marriage.

As demonstrated in these quotes, marriage in the lives of young British South Asian Muslims in Britain remains a fundamental institution forming the basis of their communities; they do not perceive this as also being the case for their non-Muslim British

counterparts, although their comments seem to echo the British Conservative Party's concept that marriage remains important for society. Respondents were therefore asked whether they feel that there are gender differences in the ways that marriage, as an institution, is perceived or rated in importance by young Muslims in British South Asian communities. I asked this question so as to find out whether Muslim girls face greater pressure from families/communities to get married, hence providing understandings of how gendered identities remain linked to the institution of marriage within South Asian communities; for instance, does culture or religion support gender discrimination when it comes to women and marriage? Do young women therefore think that there are inter-generational changes (based on ethnic traditions) in the ways women consider marriage, compared to their mothers or grandmothers? From my study, I have noted the cultural assumptions surrounding the effect of community and parental expectations around when and how women should marry, and the gendered expectations around the gender roles in marriage. In the following section, I focus on these issues in order to assess the value respondents attribute to marriage.

6.2.2 Gendered differences: the importance of marriage in British South Asian Muslim communities

The majority of participants think that Muslim women and men in British Muslim South Asian communities perceive marriage to be 'important'; with four of them stating that marriage is part of the 'Islamic code'. Gender barriers, supported by cultural traditions that women and men should be treated differently, are evident when it comes to how communities perceive Muslim women and men, and marital obligations. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents suggest that marriage remains an 'important' institution for both Muslim women and men in their respective communities.

'You have to get married, we grow up knowing that...the white girls grow up saying 'I want to be an airplane pilot' and we grow up, different, thinking 'when I grow up I'm gonna marry him or her', it is an expectation and it is part of the Islamic code to have a wife or a husband' (Sanaa).

Sanaa compares herself to 'white girls', demarcating her South Asian ethnic and Muslim community as 'different'; the former are raised to consider other life options such as education and work, as opposed to girls and boys in her community, who 'have to get married'. Marriage is seen as an obligation and also a religious duty that every Muslim has to partake in. However, Sadia perceives the religious duty attributed to marriage as being increasingly 'cultural', again drawing on the fluid boundaries that link culture and religion in British South Asian communities:

'A lot of it is cultural...cause Islam always says, the other half of the religion is marriage but it's not much the religious thing but the cultural...they don't really look at the Islamic part of it...they see 'oh God, you're past 23 years old, why are you not married!?' (Sadia)

Marriage, for some young women like Sadia, is mostly considered for cultural rather than religious reasons. Indeed, illustrating how matches are arranged, Sanaa reiterates that levels of religiosity seldom determine the choice of marriage partners that parents or communities consider.

'I think marriage, they do it more in the cultural ways, more so that the girls do...for them it's age, it depends how modern you are or how open-minded you are, for guys if parents say marry this girl they usually do, the traditional, so the culture is there but different for boys and girls' (Nazia).

As for Nazia, the gendered cultural differences that operate in Muslim women's and men's negotiations of marriage must be understood as oppositional; for girls, age remains the cultural marker whereby if a Muslim girl is 'modern and open-minded', age would and should not be an impediment to marriage. For Muslim boys, who are more 'traditional', choice of marriage partner is left to their parents. Therefore, gender differences are manifested through age (for girls) and choice of marriage partner (for boys), hence explaining why girls have to cope with more pressure when it comes to marriage. This in effect deconstructs the stereotypical images of Asian girls as always falling victims to arranged marriages; indeed, it appears that Muslim boys also face the parental pressures associated with arranged marriages in South Asian Muslim communities. This said, some respondents nonetheless do not think that any pressure is exerted on Muslim men to marry; it is more acceptable for them to marry someone belonging to a different ethnic or even religious community:

'If any of them, boys, wanted to marry outside the culture and religion it would be a lot easier for them to have their partners accepted in the community than it would be for women. Definitely' (Alia)

'Parents' influence is on both girls and boys, it comes earlier for girls but there's equal pressure, like my brother isn't really keen and I'm the youngest but he says he can get married at 35 if he wants to but I feel there is pressure on both' (Fawzia).

However, for Fawzia, the pressure that young Muslims face to get married is 'equal' for both genders, although it is probably easier for a man to marry at 35 years of age, hence showing that there is always room for them to negotiate. In the following section, I go on to explore whether marriage, as an institution, generates intergenerational gendered expectations for the young Muslim women I interviewed; this is important as it throws light on how different gendered expectations may influence the very nature of the institution of marriage in British South Asian communities.

The majority of respondents believe that communities encourage marriage so as to promote cultural continuity and identity in British South Asian Muslim societies. Marrying 'in or out' of communities becomes an area of contention for young Muslim women as they adapt or resist cultural codes of 'having to settle down'. Indeed, parents rely on local communities' ideals of marriage whilst young women are developing autonomous perspectives of how they wish married life to be. However, the communities' influence is decreasing as it is becoming more popular for women to marry 'out' of their families or communities, due to mindsets evolving.

'Things are changing now with time... it's just once upon a time it was about family ties but in my family, there have been so many people marrying outside the family that it's now a bit more easily accepted' (Alia).

'Parents are supportive of careers but there's still social pressure to get married and they get it from society... relatives who keep asking 'is your daughter married? How old is she?' So they feel guilty, they think they are not doing the right thing by you... I'm still single, they feel they are to blame and they haven't done the right thing by introducing me to people and they feel responsible...the community is on their back' (Farha).

Unlike Alia's response, Farha believes that parents still face enquiries from communities ('social pressure') as to how their daughters are progressing on the marriage front; marriage is hence a public, and not a private or individual matter that is left to women to decide. Farha's experiences probably differ from Alia's as Farha maintains that her parents have tried to arrange a few matches, most of which she turned down. As such, Farha claims that her parents feel pressure to find someone whom she could envisage marrying. As her words suggest, feelings such as 'guilt' and 'blame' depict how powerful communities can be when it comes to social norms such as marriage. Furthermore, supporting the 'family structure by keeping the community happy' (Sadiah) highlights how marriage strengthens cultural bonds amongst South Asian ethnic communities.

'My younger cousin's mother-in-law said 'How old are you?' and she thought I was younger than my cousin because she got married and had a baby and therefore I must be younger and I was of lowest status because I was not married, the only way you're really recognised and valued is when you're married with a baby and I've been studying and that's not recognised, so I feel like I need to marry as I want to look more mature and that's not right, I want to earn money, travel and see more than curry houses' (Sanaa).

'Marriage in the community... doesn't matter if you don't speak to each other or sleep together as long as you're married and my dad wants us to get married and that's the last of his duties and I don't think he really cares about me or wants me to be happy, he's thinking 'she's 25 now and what are people thinking? You're treated like an outcast' (Sanaa).

Sanaa's quote highlights a key theme in my research as it demonstrates how respondents are actively negotiating marriage. As she explores her educational path, marriage gets delayed. As Sanaa maintains, her education is not valued and it is assumed she is younger than her married cousin due to her single status; she is thus viewed as a social pariah by other women in her family and her 'lower status' or 'outcast' status is reflective of how significant marriage is as an institution largely contributing to Muslim women's gendered identities. Sanaa's use of powerful terms such as 'lower' and 'outcast' to define the status of unmarried women in the community highlights the pressure which participants may have to handle. Indeed, marriage in the community brings status, respect and recognition to Muslim women. Whether a couple lives together happily and healthily or not, according to Sanaa, is not the primary concern of family or community. However, she is breaking cultural moulds demonstrating that young women's priorities have evolved, as they increasingly reflect individual choices rather than communal wishes.

Furthermore, Lubaina and Sonia stress the gender bias that obviously operates in British Muslim communities when it comes to marriage and extra-marital relationships:

'Men take the biggest advantage of marriage to mess about with other women. They would go with two women at the same time, marry whom mum wants and then go out with a girlfriend, it's happening...the community influences that view. They let men get away with it. If that was a woman, they wouldn't let her get away with it. They'd stone her, no doubt' (Lubaina)

'Muslim men get away with more...can you imagine a Muslim woman getting married and having a boyfriend? I'm talking about British Muslim men here, they get married abroad and they come back and they've got girlfriends and they do it under their parents' faces, it's really sad and the wives, half of the time they're not in the country, it's so common it's unbelievable' (Sonia).

These quotes demonstrate the perceived gender inequalities, even for educated women like my respondents. Denouncing the common illicit relationships that some married Muslim men indulge in, Lubaina maintains that Muslim women would never be allowed such behaviour, while Sonia draws on the problematic circumstances that arranged transnational marriages create as the absence of transnational wives from the sub-continent further encourages Muslim men to have girlfriends. By using the word 'stone', Lubaina refers to the practice of stoning women to death, as stipulated by Shari'a law as a punishment against adultery; again, the imagery she chooses remains a powerful indicator demonstrating the community's attitudes to married women who would attempt extra-marital relationships. Drawing on how prominent this problem is, Sonia and Lubaina both condemn the communities' leniency on such gender disparity in how marriage is valued; culture in the community allows for men's extra-marital affairs, while daughters are 'protected' and must 'settle down'. The underlying social fabric that is being referred to in these communities is a

patriarchal system where men are given 'freedom' to threaten the institution of marriage as long as women 'honour' and conform to its principles.

Nevertheless, respondents reiterate that even though communities expect them to marry, they are ready to some extent, to challenge parental expectations so as to fulfill their individual notions of marriage. In this process, young women are re-defining the institution of marriage in their communities. Here, I briefly outline how respondents negotiate intergenerational expectations of marriage and what impacts these have on respondents' perceptions of marriage.

'Expectations... a good character, there should be mutual attraction, even more than religion cause you have to go to bed with them but what they (parents) want for us is Mr. perfect, house, car, good education, good family background, money, and he'll have to be Pakistani but for me, he has to be Islamic...my expectations used to be really high but now they've changed because I'm more educated in Islam' (Aisha).

As Aisha highlights, views about potential marriage partners differ intergenerationally; most young women's concerns rest with Islamic principles around marriage as well as physical attraction between partners, while parents still value status, economic prospects and ethnicity as being most important when it comes to their daughters' marriage options. These indicate acute differences in daughters' versus parents' expectations of marriage. Indeed, most young women acknowledge that the expectations of marriage held by themselves, as compared to their mothers or even grandmothers, differ. Nevertheless, respondents maintain that the expectations may have been the same but their mothers' were never met due to either cultural traditions or the inability for women to have the independence to express their wishes prior to marriage. Fawzia explains:

'We had a talk about marriage and mum said 'try and get on with him as a relationship partner'...my parents, they're not friends...they're partners but my dad makes the decisions and my mum doesn't have an input in anything. She said to me just make sure that he's your friend and that he understands and respects you and that is paramount to me, so we do have the same expectations, but she didn't find them and she said I hope this doesn't happen to you' (Fawzia).

Fawzia highlights that the relationship between her parents mirrored more the notion of partnership rather than friendship between married couples; the commitment between couples was more business-like as opposed to having deeper emotional involvement and equal status which modern couples aspire to. From this examination, it is clear that there are intergenerational differences in how daughters and parents regard the institution of marriage and the gender relationships within it. This generation of young South Asian Muslim women is therefore very much aware and keen to maintain control over their marriage expectations. This point mirrors what Yasmin previously reiterated about how women are

marrying at a later stage (after education) and consequently, how this leads them to develop different expectations from men as far as marriage is concerned (Chapter Four, page 131).

With educational and financial independence, women find themselves in positions which allow them to exert authority over marriage options. As I argued in Chapter Four, educational and paid employment experiences provide participants with space to configure new gendered identities. As such, daughters have the independence to resist imposed cultural codes so as to affirm individual choices and meanings of what marriage, as an institution, entails, hence redefining British Muslim marriages in their communities. Respondents also highlight that there is an average age for women to marry, thereby highlighting the fact that they often possibly feel the pressure to 'settle down'. Nevertheless, with young women pushing the age of marriage to their late twenties and going into higher education/work instead, they are formulating 'new' and alternative cultural 'traditions', where marriage is still viewed as important, but is delayed until young women feel 'ready' and 'stable' enough to get married. This is important as it shows how women are negotiating potential avenues to make marriage not the only life option, but part of a wider plan which they navigate for the future.

In the next section, I look further at women's attitudes as they negotiate the practice of marriage, and ultimately the gendered relationships which remain integral to these negotiation processes. The analysis comprises three levels. Firstly, I focus on how respondents perceive pre-marital relationships as they critically reflect on how these could affect marital choices. Secondly, I review how women develop alternative expectations of gender equality in marriage as they aim to challenge fixed gendered notions of South Asian womanhood within the family unit; I particularly concentrate on respondents' expectations and experiences of juggling work and domestic chores, as well as sharing their households with their in-laws. Thirdly, I analyse how 'choice' of marriage partner becomes an axis for negotiating choices in marriage; more specifically, I reflect on the practice of 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages in British South Asian Muslim communities, and the ways in which these customs provide scope and space for respondents to navigate gendered identities. Linked to these themes, I also explore some of the challenges faced by women as they attempt to alter gender norms so as to promote gender equality in the household, which ultimately, alters the meanings of what marriage, as an institution, stands for in their communities.

6.3 RE-NEGOTIATING THE PRACTICE OF MARRIAGE

6.3.1 Negotiating pre-marital relationships: ‘Boyfriends’, pre-marital sex and cohabitation

Previous research (Basit, 1997; Bhopal, 1997) has highlighted that young British South Asian Muslim women are encouraged to maintain sexual purity before marriage, whereby girls engaging into pre-marital relationships prove to be a ‘dishonour’ to the reputation of families and communities. My research shows similar trends, where the majority of Muslim women I spoke to are still upholding community norms which safeguard the institution of marriage in their societies. Most have not had relationships (boyfriends) at university, claiming that having a relationship before marriage is not acceptable to them personally, as well as to their families. However, a minority admits they have ‘dated’ although they consider it to be ‘un-Islamic’; nevertheless, ‘dating’ for them is always considered in conjunction with the possibility of marriage, where they hope to marry their partners. Therefore, in negotiating the unbending rules of not having any relationship before marriage, some respondents are navigating their ways around the practice of marriage in their communities. Only two respondents were in a relationship at the time of interviewing. Among those who were married, only two respondents profess that their husbands had been long-time boyfriends from their university years, albeit having had to keep them secret until their engagements:

‘I was 17 when I met him. I couldn’t tell them I had met somebody now and ask them to trust me for the next several years, I am not going to do anything...so we met just at university, in secret, it was very difficult’ (Sabina).

Pre-marital relationships in South Asian Muslim communities are condemned, whereby young Muslim women have to navigate amidst individual and communal views imposed by cultural expectations or standards; within such processes, they develop moralising discourses about dating, virginity before marriage, as well as issues around the cohabitation of the sexes before marriage. Their views, as well as actions, remain deeply embedded within Islamic ideals that encourage minimum physical interaction between the sexes. Although going to university and living away from home, young women are undeniably upholding religious and cultural ideals. More importantly, their convictions are about personal choice, and are not merely informed by parental restrictions. Here, I stress the transition taking place due to women’s negotiations of religious and cultural boundaries associated with the practice of marriage; Muslim women will date but their actions act as a precursor to marriage. This demonstrates that there is some transformation to the institution of marriage, as understood by respondents’ parents. As Saeema says:

'The time I have a boyfriend will be when I'm ready to settle down, so I don't want a boyfriend for the fun of experimenting like people do here, that's not Islamic, it will have to be with the intention of marriage' (Saeema).

'If I meet anyone, they'd rather I don't hide it and I could sort something out with them. They wouldn't like to cast him as boyfriend, like the western way you see. Neither would I because I wouldn't want to be labeled to have been with anyone without marrying them. So, they'd let me get to know them but at the same time they'd like to meet the family. So in a controlled environment they'd let me. It's just keeping my own self respect within society and I agree with that' (Zainab).

As Saeema and Zainab maintain, having a 'boyfriend' is only acceptable if marriage is being seriously considered. The very notion of 'boyfriend' is also deconstructed by young women, who emphasise the fact that the kind of relationship they are after is different from the 'western' notion of 'being in a relationship'. In their cases, family and community will be involved in the process of Muslim girls starting relationships. Below, Haleema underlines how Islamic guidelines govern women's attitudes towards relationships and marriage; the concept of 'halal (permissible) dating' which allows space for young Muslim women living in the 'west' to explore:

'Islam doesn't say you can't fall in love but some British Muslims or some western Muslims go about things the wrong way, like in the west...the way it's done here, I don't agree with going clubbing or going on a holiday abroad together alone, not appropriate, if you want to get to know the person, Islam sets a criteria, as long as you have a chaperone with you. Have them in the area so if you go to a restaurant, your elder brother could be sat somewhere so getting to know the person, no illicit relationships, having a boyfriend and dating him like what normally goes on in the western culture no, needs to be halal dating' (Haleema).

More than half of my research sample maintains that due to their religious convictions, pre-marital sexual activities are 'not acceptable' and 'wrong', with the exception of a few, who maintain that this issue is 'personal' and not necessarily an 'absolute'. It is clear that for respondents, the issue is about re-negotiating appropriate moral and sexual behaviour through the boundaries they set for themselves.

'If you go by the religious rule of not having sex before marriage then you really shouldn't be doing anything before marriage. Religiously, the system is supposed to be you get married fairly young and you don't really experiment...women are getting married later now. So you study, have a career, that's all part of Western society and then saying, you can't actually have the rest...you have to wait until you get married... those two are really difficult things to combine, practically. Virginity is an important Islamic code but is not an absolute, not here and now' (Farha).

Thinking practically, Farha argues that in a 'western' context, it is extremely difficult to fully embrace Islamic ideals such as virginity before marriage while other facets such as women's independence to have careers and education are encouraged. If the latter is embraced by women, so should the former. Indeed, contextualising the 'Islamic system',

Farha highlights the pressure that young Muslims face. She questions whether it is fair for women to be unable to benefit from all the independence that British society may offer. However, for women who are in relationships, limitations they set themselves indicate how they cope with these double standards. For instance, the term 'boyfriend' and what this indicates in the British context (physical relationship) remains inappropriate for some respondents who are in relationships. As Mushirah states:

'I have a boyfriend, I don't like the word, I don't think dating is fine cause Islamically it's not but my relationship is not physical, we go out for coffee but I would not call that a full on girlfriend boyfriend relationship but we are committed spiritually to each other, the rest has to wait' (Mushirah).

In essence, even though Mushirah 'dates', she decides to set limits to her relationship by not being sexually involved with her partner, even though marriage has been discussed between them. In being 'spiritually committed', Mushirah explores the boundaries of romantic love. Furthermore, Asma states:

'I find it difficult to say I'm religious because people find out I've got a boyfriend, it's like 'How can you do that?' They don't really know what kind of relationship we have. But people judge me on that. But I would never have premarital sex, which is normal in the west. Some people would be like you can't hold hands but we do have a physical relationship, but again, in my boundary' (Asma).

Asma is also in a relationship. Due to her relationship, she feels that her religious beliefs and convictions are judged, even questioned by other Muslims. This said, Asma maintains that she respects the limitations set by Islam; her physical relationship is not of a sexual nature and in compromising, Asma is happy to keep a balance between Islamic and 'western' concepts. In this study, only two unmarried respondents admit to having had pre-marital sex at university. Indeed, Nazia goes on to explain the dilemmas that young women may face, hence raising questions around whether it is viable to fully respect Islamic codes in the British context:

'I'm saying no pre-marital sex if you are cohabiting, just to know each other then that's fine. I can say it so easily now, but if you are in that environment, how much self-control does a person actually have? With education, marriage gets delayed and you've got to make life decision. Do you want to get married because you don't want pre-marital sex? Or have a relationship but wait till you get married?' (Nazia)

Education, in delaying marriage, opens up new spaces for Muslim women, which consequently lead them to evaluate their positions as Muslim women. More importantly, Nazia's comment about 'making life decisions' indicate that women will potentially be forced to adapt to the social changes facing South Asian women in Britain.

When asked whether they think that pre-marital sex is common in South Asian Muslim communities in Britain, some respondents suggest that it is on the rise, albeit remaining taboo in their communities:

'There's a lot of pre-marital sex among British Muslims, I mean getting pregnant and a lot of abortions, the statistics are rising, I've had friends go through that, it's quite common' (Nadia).

'I went to an all girls' Muslim school and it was happening even then, with girls who were about 12, 13 years old...and that's due to the fact that a lot of families can be very narrow-minded and keep such a tight hold on their daughters, so university, just imagine' (Haleema).

Due to Islamic ideals of minimum physical contact before marriage, as expected, most young women in this study do not agree with the idea of cohabitation before marriage; among them, those who are single, engaged or in a relationship would not personally envisage cohabiting before marriage either. However, a few women remain open to the idea, as long as it is done 'away from the community'; un-married couples living together would 'bring shame on the family' and young women specified that their parents could never know:

'I can see why people would want to live with their partners before wanting to commit to marriage because marriage is such a big commitment...and you might think you know somebody until you've lived with them...whether I would consider doing it...it's a difficult question. If I was at home I wouldn't do it as it would reflect on my parents...shame on the family. Away from home, if I had to do it, I would...secretive, like living a lie' (Alia).

'The tradition is you can't do that before marriage, it's easier in a way when you live with someone you know instead of living with housemates, like a randomer! Doesn't make any sense! I'm actually living in hospital accommodation with other people, males sometimes! Technically that's not Islamic either but it seems so normal whereas living with a partner isn't; I'm engaged and will never be allowed to live with my fiancé!' (Bushra)

Bushra, reflecting on the inability to cohabit with men before marriage, highlights the irony of her current situation. Her living arrangements mean that she is sharing with colleagues, males or females, which is regarded as acceptable by her parents and her community. However, official status such as engagements or being in a serious relationship will not gain the approval of the South Asian community in cases where couples decide to live together before marriage. This demonstrates the highly contradictory situations that young women find themselves in whilst navigating between Islamic and British ideals. In so doing, participants are making choices to engage in a process of re-negotiation of marriage. Consequently, this influences gendered notions of Muslim womanhood, as well as the practice of marriage as they decide to get involved, albeit within boundaries, in pre-marital relationships. In the following section, I examine how respondents question and challenge

gendered norms about marriage by focusing on their marital expectations about gender equality in marriage.

6.3.2 Gender equality in marital expectations: challenging ‘traditional’ norms

British South Asian Muslim women are contesting expected gender norms that unmarried women in their communities have to uphold. Their determination to ensure that their individual expectations are met is reflected through their willingness to live independently from the extended family unit, have agency in who they marry (choice of marriage partners), as well as promoting a more equal relationship between spouses. Among married women in this research (five), two of them were still residing with their in-laws whilst the rest had their own households. All unmarried women, and those who were engaged or were in relationships, admit that they would not want to live with their in-laws when they get married, although it is widely expected that they move in with their husband’s family after marriage. They explain why they do not wish to follow the traditional pattern; as expectations change, consequently, gender roles alter significantly to empower women with new lifestyle patterns. First, I focus on unmarried women’s gender roles expectations in the household and second, I briefly reiterate the challenges faced by married respondents as they evaluate gendered relationships in their marriages.

Muslim women are contributing in changing their lifestyle by being involved in promoting ideals of future marriage options. In this study, among the unmarried women, the majority claim that they all have expectations that they would like to discuss with potential partners when the time to get married comes; only one respondent maintains that she is not concerned with how her marriage plans pan out in the future. As Lubaina maintains:

‘I don’t have any expectations of marriage...if my parents give me a list of guys, I would consider and then get to know the person, love is not important when you decide to marry, in a marriage, you do your thing, I’ll do my thing. I’m supposed to do things Islamically...I think I’d be very British, not British but very modern in the context that I wouldn’t want him to restrict me in any way. I wouldn’t listen, knowing me. And then that would cause problems probably’ (Lubaina).

Indeed, Lubaina is ready to marry somebody her parents choose as love in a marriage is not a significant issue for her personally. Interestingly, however, Lubaina expects, albeit subtly, that she is left with her independence and if not, is aware that this could be problematic. Juxtaposing ‘Islam’ versus ‘British’, compromises in a marriage will be made due to her Islamic convictions that Muslim wives have duties expected of them not by culture, but by religion. Claiming that she will be ‘modern’, Lubaina expresses her wish for independence in a marriage as she decides ‘to do my thing’. Indeed, the majority of respondents profess

that they expect to be perceived as having 'equal' status within a marriage, where both partners contribute financially and emotionally into the marriage:

'Somebody who is my equal, to take care of the bills together and I want to travel before I have kids and this doesn't happen in a Pakistani community as all they want is for you to have kids' (Mushirah).

'I will expect that both of us contribute to the marriage, to the house, to the financial things, being parents and doing things together' (Sanaa).

Mushirah's and Sanaa's beliefs in a marital relationship which fulfills individual needs such as having the freedom to travel and have children in one's own time, as well as share the financial costs of maintaining a household are echoed by most respondents. So as to be in a position to achieve such goals, Nazia highlights the importance that education has on women's expectations in marriage. Indeed, without education, it is impossible to expect equality in a marriage. Nazia denounces young Muslim women who are made to marry in their mid teens as without education, women cannot bargain for a more equitable lifestyle:

'At 16, they (parents) want you to marry but you've got nothing to give, you just know how to cook and clean, you're not educated, you don't have standards, so you can't demand 'I want this'...so my relationship, would be completely equal, I would work, my husband would work. I iron his clothes if he irons mine' (Nazia).

Saeema reflects on how the household becomes the site of contestation where women challenge constructed gendered roles so as to encourage gender equality within the family unit. As she points out, daughters who get married are expected to live with their in-laws so as to fulfill the gender norm expected of them:

'I would never agree to living with the in-laws... in-laws see it as gaining a slave, not a wife for your husband but someone to look after them and their daughters, to maintain the house and I'm not willing to do that...it's not my responsibility... I'm not going to wash every dish after they finish eating or cook, that's the expectation they have. His mum wants this and he doesn't stick up for you and he sides with his mother, classic... if you live with the in-laws, then you accept that you are marrying the family, it's not only what the husband wants, it's what the rest wants' (Saeema).

Comparatively, Bhopal (1997) also draws on how living arrangements after marriage influence women's lives; gender discrimination against daughters-in-law is evident as women, especially those who are not educated, face their husbands' families on a daily basis. As a result, they experience what she terms 'private patriarchy' in the household, where without education, women remain subdued and excluded (Bhopal, 1997: 152). In fact, Sadia expresses this idea by saying that women 'marry the family', whereby responsibilities sum up to cooking and cleaning for the family, roles which Muslim women nowadays are not prepared to fulfill any longer. Marriage for them would epitomise a more nuclear type, equitable approach to a couple deciding to live together to start a family,

where responsibility and commitment rest with each other rather than extending to the larger extended family:

'I'm not going to go home and do all the washing, it's got to be 50-50 and have some compromise. And living with the in-laws that would be a big issue...so many marriages mess up because of the in-laws, they wreck everything and I've seen the damage they cause' (Shazia).

Shazia expresses frustration at the older generations' expectations of female members in South Asian communities; she is determined to break cultural traditions and adopt a more egalitarian approach to married life. As her words show, the influence of in-laws on a couple's life cannot be ignored. Young women's awareness to potential crisis caused by in-laws results in them wanting to have their own household so as to avoid clashes due to huge differences in women's notions of their roles or responsibilities of marriage. Indeed, unmarried respondents strongly maintain and hope that they will be successful in implementing equal or adequate household involvement from future husbands, hence demonstrating potential cultural changes in gender roles within South Asian communities. Respondents like Tasneem do emphasise that an almost equal relationship, albeit compromising in certain logical circumstances, is necessary so as to 'get rid' of the gender bias that cultural traditions entail:

'I'd like to have that equal role as much as possible...I accept that it's not going to be 100 percent same and you have to compromise and say they have to go for work and if they're a higher level, it would be stupid to say 'no you're not taking that job because my job is there, get rid of that cultural inequality against women' (Tasneem).

Furthermore, a common argument expressed by some women highlights that there are intergenerational differences in how gender roles are perceived and practised:

'It's about wanting to be an equal as a woman and be able to go into work and I'd like him to respect that. I didn't go into this career or education to just then sit at home and breed like women before did. These are not what my intentions were. I'd like to be able to do both and I do have those expectations. I can have children and have a career' (Hanah).

To be more explicit, Hanah confidently stresses that her 'intentions' are not to 'sit at home and breed'; marriage and motherhood are not considered her life's destiny. As a highly educated woman determined to be an 'equal' with her prospective partner, she will demand that her expectations are met in the future. With more women going into higher education and juggling careers, marriage partners are finding themselves having to 'help' out in the household. For instance, Alia states:

'My younger married female cousins have comfortable relationships, they work well that's nice to see, that's how I want to end up. But it can get incredibly frustrating with the older generation in the ways women are treated' (Alia).

It is clear that women's exposure of the intergenerational changes taking place enables them to critically reflect on what they expect from marriage. As Muslim men become more active in the household, Muslim women's roles are altered, bringing about gendered cultural shifts in marriage perceptions as they decide to juggle career and home responsibilities.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that most respondents, however, express the wish to either take time off work or go part-time whenever they decide to start raising a family. They would then want their husbands to provide for them financially and hence, expect to go back to the 'traditional' gender pattern that their communities consider to be valuable. Indeed, young women demonstrate how much agency or leverage they possess in deciding when and when not to take up employment. Although the majority of respondents' mothers in this research never worked and looked after them as children, respondents suggest that what makes them different from women of the previous generation is that they have choices and options to re-negotiate their gendered stances as life circumstances, such as motherhood, alter their lifestyles. Nevertheless, participants are actually making quite traditional choices. As Saeema and Shazia reiterate:

'I just want to keep working, and he can keep his job when I have kids, I'd like to take the time out for sure' (Saeema).

'I would want him to allow me to do whatever I choose to do, whether I will work or not because I believe that the husband should be able to provide for you cause if I had kids, I wouldn't want to work' (Shazia).

Women can hence 'choose' to make informed decisions and conscious, independent career moves that fit around family life; husbands are expected to accept respondents' choices in 'whatever I choose to do'. As I discussed in Chapter Four, financial independence for young British South Asian Muslim women remains extremely important in aiding them to form new gendered identities. However, it is as important for prospective partners to be financially stable. As Shazia reiterates, although she demands the freedom to be independent, she still believes that it is a husband's duty to provide for his family; Shazia does not find any contradiction in such a view. Similarly, Fawzia reiterates that she thinks 'traditionally' and will encourage her marriage partner to become the 'principal' breadwinner; albeit the woman working out of choice ('her own decision'):

'Roles in the marriage quite traditional, the guy should be earning more than the woman and hopefully I'll be a doctor so will be earning so he should be earning equal or more. I think it's natural in a man to be the principal bread-earner...if the

woman does then it's her own decision and then kids, I would want to be at home as I'd want to bring them up myself and my partner must also be involved' (Fawzia).

Although unmarried respondents' aspirations for gender equality in South Asian Muslim marriages remain potent, from my study, it is also evident that there is an obvious gap between women's hopes of acquiring their own households (nuclear family set-up), as well as equal gender status they aspire to within a marriage. The realities of essentially achieving such aims appear to be difficult. To support this argument, I look at married respondents' narratives of how their lived experiences of married life affect their gendered identities as married women. For instance, Sabina, who lives with her in-laws and has now been married for two years, highlights the difficulties involved in convincing them to accept the couple's wishes to set up their own household. As the daughter-in-law, she is expected to accept this lifestyle as her husband, the only son, is expected to look after his parents. Marriage, for her, has not brought the independence she wished for and even though Sabina does not agree with her current living arrangements, they are considered a 'natural' progression by her family and community:

'I didn't agree with staying with my in-laws but it just naturally happened...we did think we would eventually move out...but the more we spend time at home the more we realise that his parents do want us to live that traditional joint family system that's their lifestyle. The only way we can move is if they go back to Pakistan, you're hostage...He's the only boy and they won't accept anything from their daughters, but will expect their son to do everything for them. I'd expect the same from my sons and my daughters...that's the shift and I'll let them free to decide how to live' (Sabina).

Describing the situation as 'hostage', Sabina expresses her concerns, even sadness, as she claims that only her in-laws decision to leave Britain could mean her having power and agency to have and manage her own household. However, interestingly, she maintains that she would expect equal commitment from her children, daughter and son, irrespective of gender, when the time comes. This indicates that women of Sabina's generation are keen to promote equal gender status for daughters and sons when it comes to fulfilling duties such as looking after their parents. Also, Sabina's quote highlights that she will not enforce any lifestyle pattern on her children in letting them 'free to decide how to live'. Others, like Sonia, condemn the continuity of such cultural traditions. Sonia relates her experiences of living with her in-laws as 'ill-treatment':

'At home I had that privacy and freedom to live but with my in-laws it's totally different. I get up at half past seven everyday and I finish at around half six and I get home from work at seven and then I have to cook for everyone, about 13 members in the family living in two houses, all in-laws. That's what a daughter-in-law is supposed to do and no one helps me, not even his sisters. I have to wash up everything and the men do nothing, and my husband is maybe the best one out of them, he won't do a thing even though I'm being ill-treated...and I've known him

for seven years before we got married...some of them eat at 8 and I basically have to be on call...that's culture for you' (Sonia).

Sonia's case is reflective of the unexpected challenges faced by educated Muslim women in the domestic sphere brought about by marriage; as a daughter living in her parental home, Sonia was allowed 'privacy' and 'freedom'. Alternatively, achieving gender equality in her extended family set-up proves to be impossible as Sonia is expected to handle the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989). After work, Sonia explains how she rushes home daily so as to have dinner ready for the whole of her extended family, comprising thirteen family members altogether:

'If I could move out I would move out today but I just can't afford it and they know it. They won't help and they could as they're a wealthy business family. We have to go out to have time alone but I still have to cook before so my expectations...well I didn't expect that and I am really unhappy' (Sonia).

Underlying patriarchal customs promote gender segregated roles within South Asian households, which Sabina and Sonia denote, is extremely difficult to challenge once a married couple settles in with the extended family. Bhopal's (1997) research on South Asian households and women's unequal gender status within the family unit has very clearly also illustrated the patriarchal nature of how domestic chores are distributed. Through Sonia's experiences, my study also demonstrates that within the family unit, the role of daughters-in-law are very defined and controlled, as opposed to daughters (husbands' sisters), who relinquish household chores to the former once they move in with their husbands.

'From a Pakistani, cultural point of view marriage is important to both, for guys they need somebody around the house, another slave, doing the cooking and fulfil their sexual needs, that's the attitude even though we live here in the West' (Mushirah).

'Muslim men want somebody who's at home...brings up the children and doesn't complain, the community expects that, I'm out working and it's not viewed as ideal as my husband would have preferred me in the house, proper Muslim wife but I earn more for the family, he's not from here and he couldn't, his culture is totally different to mine and he is different, it's too late now' (Rahila).

As some women portray, it is about 'gaining a slave' for the family, obliterating her personality or individuality in the process. In this study, therefore, unsurprisingly, all respondents speak against the traditional gender roles (steeped in culture) expected from them in a marriage. They would prefer a more equitable distribution of household chores. For Mushirah and Rahila, 'Pakistani' values such as the fulfillment of traditional female roles (cleaning, cooking) heavily influence women's marriage perspectives, which consequently reflect on their experiences of marriage. Indeed, Rahila, who married a Pakistani national, expresses regrets in not having a home environment whereby household

chores are shared equally. Rahila, in suggesting that ‘it is too late now’, seems to find it problematic to establish a more equal relationship in marriage; in fact, Rahila puts it down to the existing cultural differences (Pakistani versus British) within her household. Nonetheless, she has challenged the traditional notions of the ‘proper Muslim wife’ so as to have a career alongside her married life, although her position is not viewed as ‘ideal’ by her husband and her community. Muslim men’s wishes that wives remain homemakers are encouraged and valued by the community, which hence acts as a powerful voice dictating gendered ‘traditional’ roles that women are expected to perform.

In this section, I have shown that respondents are challenging traditional gender norms in marriage. These include changes in their marital expectations around issues such as promoting equal gender status and roles within marriage, being able to negotiate work options with their partners as participants consider raising a family, as well as embracing the possibilities of living independently from their in-laws after marriage. However, it is also evident that there are discrepancies between unmarried respondents’ expectations of marriage and married respondents’ realities of married lives. This demonstrates that the challenges faced by women remain potent as they decide to break away from cultural expectations generated by family and community. In the next section, I explore how women are re-negotiating the practice of marriage by looking at how respondents navigate ‘choice’ of marriage partner, within the broader context of families’ and communities’ involvement in practices such as arranged marriages. This further sheds light on respondents’ agency and strategies employed as they navigate marriage options.

6.3.3 Negotiating ‘choice’: why I do or don’t mind an arranged marriage

In negotiating and challenging gendered cultural expectations expected from Muslim women in British South Asian Muslim communities, another factor that respondents hope to have an input in relates to having the choice of marriage partner. Indeed, Mushirah, a confident educated Muslim woman of Pakistani origin ‘dating’ a Muslim man, also of Pakistani origin, highlights that she will not be able to marry the person she loves. The person she wishes to marry is of a different caste and due to her family’s objections, Mushirah will eventually conform to her parents’ wishes of her marrying somebody of similar status, origin and creed, thereby pushing her to consider an arranged marriage. Indeed, in the advent of families choosing potential marriage partners for daughters, shared cultural (ethnic origin/caste belonging) and religious norms form the basis of these arranged matches in South Asian communities; marriage, Islam and ethnicity in South Asian communities remain hence inter-linked, where families intend to find prospective partners sharing the same religion, ethnic background and caste.

I thus asked respondents whether ethnicity and religion matter to them if they have the option to personally choose their partners so as to firstly, examine the degrees of involvement participants have in navigating choice of marriage partners and secondly, understand whether respondents are breaking gendered cultural norms by resisting cultural practices such as arranged matches. From my findings, I found that respondents are actively negotiating their options, increasingly relying on a Muslim identity to break stereotypes that are preventing them from expressing more individual wishes (for instance ‘marrying out’ of their ethnic group/rejecting caste differences) when it comes to choice of marriage partner.

From my study, four married British Muslim women were of Pakistani origin; two of them married Pakistani nationals, and the remaining two married British Pakistanis. One respondent, of mixed ethnic heritage (Pakistani and Indian) also married a British Pakistani. In essence, they all married men of South Asian backgrounds. All married respondents maintain that a similar ethnic background remains important when women consider marriage options, despite certain nuances in their opinions. However, the significant point remains that the majority of women in this research consider religion to be much more important than ethnic background when choosing a partner. Only one respondent suggests that ‘him being Muslim would be nice, but would not be absolute, he has to be Pakistani though, like British’ (Sanaa). For her, ethnic background and citizenship take priority over Islam, as opposed to the others:

‘The guy will have to be Muslim. That’s a definite. It’s a personal choice...to have kids where nothing could confuse them. And as a Muslim, I believe that you have to marry another Muslim. I don’t care if he is Pakistani, Bengali, white’ (Saeema).

‘Ethnicity not really but Muslim of course, that’s my religious belief cause children will follow the religion of their father and to make sure that that is a priority, and in Islam you’re supposed to increase your own ummah so for me to have secular kids, doesn’t make sense’ (Fatimah).

For Saeema and Fatimah, marrying a Muslim is a ‘definite’ as they believe that the next generation needs to be left not with their cultural, but Islamic heritage. So as to shield her children from secularist notions, for Fatimah, this strategy of spreading the word of Islam remains a ‘priority’. In essence, marrying a Muslim ensures the continuity of the Muslim faith in a ‘secular’ context where respondents strongly feel it is a religious duty to ‘increase your own ummah’ so as to partake in the expansion of a universal Islamic identity. In essence, Fatimah is convinced that through marriage, Islamic identities can be maintained and affirmed.

Faiza has been married twice.¹ She recounts the differences in parental opinion by comparing her two marriages. Her arranged marriage to a British Pakistani failed, while her love marriage to a British Bengali is a success:

'My dad is a fairly liberal man and if I'm happy, he's happy now but before ethnicity was important to him...my first marriage was to a British Pakistani, arranged cause they look in your own community and didn't work out so they see that it's not a definite, but second one a love marriage, and he's Muslim, that's the most important thing now' (Faiza).

As Faiza strongly believes, cases like hers prove, particularly to the older generation, that shared ethnicity does not necessarily render marriages easier. Indeed, the majority of unmarried women in this research were not concerned with ethnic background when talking about important criteria that would define marriage partners, claiming that religion takes precedence over ethnicity. This reinforces the argument I formulated in Chapter Five about respondents prioritising an Islamic identity over other social identities. Nevertheless, among them, some claim that their parents would still expect them to marry within their own ethnic group, whereby it would be extremely difficult for them to convince the older generation to 'accept' their choices. However, more than half of the research sample suggests that there has been a shift in parental perceptions. Such divergent views are illustrated in the quotes below:

'For our parents to accept, it will have to be a Pakistani but if I had the choice and I could marry any Muslim I wanted, I wouldn't necessarily go for the Pakistani Muslim, but that would never be accepted in my family, so I need to think Pakistani' (Saeema).

Saeema explains how her choices are limited; she is given the freedom to choose a marriage partner but he undoubtedly needs to be of similar ethnic background for her family to 'accept' the match. On an individual level, ethnicity would not be important for Saeema. However, pressure from the family will obviously influence her choice of partner. Women are being granted the 'choice' by parents to pick a partner but ultimately, their 'choice' is constrained as ethnicity, in cases like Saeema's, remains an absolute she *needs* to consider. In contrast, Zainab explains:

'My parents have already said if you find anybody, as long as he's Muslim, no matter what ethnic background, we'd let you marry them cause that's the true way for Muslims' (Zainab).

Unlike Saeema, Zainab thinks that for her parents, Islam is becoming more prominent than South Asian culture as their understandings of Islam become less cultural. Two respondents think that partners need not belong to the same ethnic group specifically (Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi), but need to be 'Asian Muslim' when marriage options

are considered. As Bushra (Indian origin, engaged to British Pakistani) and Abida claim, the specificity of ethnic background does not have to go as far as Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi; marrying someone of South Asian origin is considered good enough, as long as the person is Muslim:

'Yeah he would have to be Muslim, but my fiancé is of Pakistani origin...the parents had no problem at all there. Everyone gets on ...he's Asian and Muslim and that's fine for me' (Bushra).

'He would have to be Asian and Muslim, he wouldn't have to be Pakistani...Indian, Gujarati Muslim, it would be fine' (Abida).

However, among unmarried participants, some regard ethnicity as still being important when considering marriage:

'Cultural similarities do help, if you want to transfer these to the next generation and you will understand each other better so ethnicity is really important, so he has to be Pakistani' (Tasneem).

For Tasneem, maintaining cultural continuity through marriage is evident, whereby ensuring that the next generation embraces cultural tradition remains a significant factor for young women. In essence, as some respondents 'choose' to reject commonality of ethnicity in marriage, others are determined to embrace it. Even though views are different among respondents, it is clear that participants are actively engaging with the possible options around choice of marriage partner, hence demonstrating agency in their willingness to make decisions based on their very own positionings towards the importance of shared ethnicity and religion in marriage.

I therefore go on to look at the concept of 'choice' in marriage, more specifically the arranged marriage, so as to grasp how respondents firstly, engage in active negotiations when it comes to the degree of agency women have in 'choice' of marriage partner and secondly, deconstruct the practice of 'arranged marriage' by critically differentiating the various degrees of arranged marriage as 'choice' is negotiated in marriage. I also briefly explore women's positions on the relating issues of 'cousin marriage' and 'transnational marriage' as these remain inter-linked themes which have come up during my interviews. All respondents are from cultural backgrounds where arranged marriages are still 'commonly' practised. I therefore asked them about their perspectives on arranged marriages in British South Asian Muslim communities, and the impact they have on Muslim women's options as they consider marriage partners. As Bradby (1999) claims, the nature of how marriages are contracted in ethnic groups reveals how gendered roles/expectations are manifested. Bhopal's (1997) study of arranged marriages in South Asian communities in Britain suggests that the practice must be viewed as a manifestation of unequal gender

relationships, and as a patriarchal expression of male dominance within minority cultures. Her study focuses on arranged marriages as 'traditional' practices kept alive to perpetuate the culture of minority groups in the UK. More importantly, she maintains that educated women in her research sample reject the practice of arranged marriage as opposed to non-educated respondents.

In comparison, my study demonstrates the opposite, whereby most research participants maintain that arranged marriages are 'ok', and would consider them as an option if 'force' is not adopted by parents at any time during the marriage process (from proposal to marriage). They hence remain acutely aware that matches should not be 'forced' upon them; women should be able to 'agree' without 'pressure' and be allowed to 'make informed decisions'. Moreover, most women also express their concerns about transnational arranged marriages, whereby only a few respondents maintain that they do not mind marrying 'someone from back home'. A minority of respondents disagrees with the tradition of arranged marriage altogether, while some believe that an arranged marriage has positive as well as negative points. Among married participants, three respondents had love marriages and two had arranged marriages.

'Arranged marriages, I don't see a huge problem with them. It is parents facilitating the process of you finding the person, you're looking for someone and they know that so they're helping you. So it's already approved and that's all I need, my parents' approval, they said if you don't like it, we're not going to force you. I would prefer to meet someone myself cause you meet them in a more natural environment rather than the set up with the girl's family and boy's family and the tea' (Fawzia).

Respondents like Fawzia demonstrate freedom and agency in leaving their options open. Indeed, although she would prefer to meet someone unaided and experience a more 'natural' meeting, having the choice to consider an arranged marriage leads to better communication between her and her parents in terms of the latter approving of potential partners. More importantly, she values the leeway given to her by her family to negotiate her options. Indeed, Bhopal (2008) suggests that arranged marriages are nowadays often seen as 'introductions' in which women have greater agency and choice to decide whether they would consider a proposal. For Shabana, who had an arranged marriage, love is possible in an arranged match, even without having met the person beforehand:

'When I grew older I realised that you can fall in love with your husband even though you meet just before marriage, it's possible, I did, you need to be open, I know this idea for westerners seems crazy...If your husband is nice then it's a waste of time to find someone else, you learn as you go' (Shabana).

Breaking 'western' pre-requisites of needing to 'get to know the person' before marriage, Shabana's views also reflect the possibility of agency, whereby women rely on practicality

as opposed to romanticism, prior to marriage. Similarly, Shaw and Charsley (2006) have documented that love after marriage remains a significant trait within the arranged marriage concept.

However, other respondents explain why they feel comfortable with arranged marriages:

'I won't be looking. I'd want my parents to look. If I choose someone, and I anything goes wrong, my parents would say like you chose him, you went out with him, and I will be alone...if they pick someone, it goes terribly wrong... I can blame them. I don't want them to turn on me, so why not agree with them anyway' (Lubaina).

'I will expect my mum to pick someone...because they know my values so I'd expect my mum and dad to choose someone for me. That's their culture and I embrace it. They have given me a choice, though. They have said that you could go down the British line, pick someone you find. Obviously, they know I won't go to the extreme level' (Abida).

Lubaina and Abida not only accept arranged marriages as viable options, but also expect their parents to fully decide on their future marriage partners, albeit for different reasons. In strategically granting families an absolute right in choosing their daughters' marriage partners, women show they are aware of the risks involved if they decide to choose their own path in marriage; Lubaina, in conforming to gendered expectations, has someone to 'blame' if her marriage fails in the future. In a sense, relying on her family's support seems to be more important than having the 'choice' to marry someone she individually picks. Portraying a negative view of marriage, Lubaina fears that a love marriage gone wrong will involve her family's loss of support. Subtly, Lubaina is resolved to 'agree' with her parents' choice so as not to disrupt established family patterns. This indicates that women can feel compelled to passively accept traditional concepts so as to gain the family's trust or approval. On the other hand, although Abida is given the choice to decide, she wholeheartedly leaves it to her parents to decide on her prospects, hence demonstrating that although empowered, young women still trust their parents in marriage matters; to 'choose' someone herself is equated to 'going down the British line' and being 'extreme', whereby Abida much prefers to 'embrace' her parents' 'culture' instead.

Rejecting practicality and 'security', and disagreeing with Shabana, Farha's notion of marriage is based on love and attraction developed on an individual, more personal level:

'I don't like that you're set up and you judge the other person from the minute you see them and you will be ticking boxes ...when you meet people on your own, you're not thinking of them like that. You really get to know the person without judging...so this practice got its inherent defects. People who marry for security, the system

would work...otherwise if you're after love, you can't have an arranged marriage and I believe you should only marry for love' (Farha).

Indeed, Farha broke two engagements following two arranged matches as she is against the 'unnatural' dimension an arranged marriage brings between two people.

'There have been love marriages in the family but they're segregated because of that but now people are understanding, instead of loving somebody and then going on to commit adultery because they couldn't get married is worse than getting married, from an Islamic perspective that's allowed and if this happens to me I'm going to fight' (Fatimah).

In Fatimah's family, love marriages are stigmatised and arranged marriages are viewed as having more value than the former. However, Fatimah criticises this concept and is resolved to ensure that she does not face a situation where she is confronted with a loveless marriage; loveless marriages, for her, will lead to adultery, a sin in Islam. Islam therefore acts as potential weapon to 'fight' any pressure used to conform to family ideals which are bounded by cultural conventions. As for Nazia, arranged marriages infringe on women's rights:

'In my culture, arranged marriage, you've compromised your life straight out as you don't even know the guy. Your parents have decided and it's not your approval. If you chose, it's a good thing. My cousins have studied but even they had to have it and I can't deal with that. How can you marry somebody you don't know? My parents' had one but it worked because my mum wanted to be a housewife but in my context, I'm so broad-minded, I find it so bizarre, it works because the wife submits and the husband takes over control, it's patriarchy, everything the girl wants she suppresses and she follows her husband's footsteps' (Nazia).

Denouncing the patriarchal nature of the custom, Nazia's comments mirror Bhopal's (1997: 149-50) argument that arranged marriages remain deeply rooted within 'private' patriarchal structures which are encouraged by South Asian households; the custom is supported and enforced by the 'biraderi' (Shaw & Charsley, 2006), where gendered expectations of 'agreeing' to a match, in Nazia's words, 'compromising', remain significant. For Nazia, the 'context' she lives in does not allow for such customs. Unlike some other participants in this research who profess scope for educated women to negotiate in an arranged marriage situation, Nazia maintains that her independence clashes with the practice, which acts as hub for 'patriarchal control'. Nazia is not ready to 'submit' to any man, not even to a husband. Fulfilling her individual expectations outside marriage is given priority over the community's expectations of what they expect from her as a wife. As Yasmin agrees, parental pressure to accept matches usually infringe on what daughters expect in a marriage:

'Oh absolutely I'd like to choose...there are people who have approached me since I finished graduating so I'm considering them but my mum is like why are you not already saying yes but I need to see if I get on with that person because when parents get involved, they have their own agendas, they put what they want their child to have first, not what the two people want, marriage is about two people

making their life together , not about the mum telling the son what she should be asking for' (Yasmin).

Indeed, Yasmin is determined not to rush in with any offer of marriage as developing a relationship with the person first is primordial; marriage 'is about two people', and not about the 'mum' or the 'son'. Resisting parental 'agendas' reveal generational tension in marital re-negotiations. This said, other respondents maintain that arranged matches can be both positive and negative:

'I think some of them tend to work out like my parents, primary example and some of them have gone disastrously wrong, like my first marriage, it's a pot of luck and if it works out, it works out well and if it doesn't then it can ruin the rest of your life basically' (Faiza).

'It's got advantages and disadvantages and I had an arranged marriage and if something goes wrong I wouldn't blame my parents, but if I had a love marriage and it didn't work out they would say 'we told you so' but because it's an arranged marriage they can't say anything but obviously parents know best I suppose cause they've experienced a lot and seen a lot' (Rahila).

Based on their experiences, Faiza and Rahila both had arranged marriages and reiterate that there are potential risks to them being successful. Faiza's arranged marriage failed, whilst Rahila has expressed unhappiness with her current marital experiences; nevertheless, they both seem to maintain that arranged marriages should still be considered by women. Rahila also highlights that if love marriages do not work, parents will automatically blame daughters for their decisions, a fear expressed earlier by Lubaina. Indeed, parental reactions may therefore influence young women's moves when it comes to considering love marriages as opposed to arranged marriages.

Nevertheless, Bushra and Sonia reflect on how parental attitudes to arranged marriage are rapidly changing in British South Asian communities:

'Before it was strict among Asians, like the boy and girl hardly know each other, it was mainly about the two families, now they're talking to each other on the phone, texting, chatting and meeting up and the families are fine, so evolution in how it's done' (Bushra)..

'A lot of change now with arranged marriage...a lot of parents say to their children is there anybody? They're more open to love marriages' (Sonia).

As young Muslim women become more assertive in their choice of marriage partner, opportunities to 'get to know' potential future husbands are redefining the nature of such marriages; women seem to negotiate the cultural custom of arranged marriage on their terms. This is actually revealing in the fact that arranged marriages will be considered, while transnational marriages do not seem to appeal to women I interviewed:

'Everybody knows that that's the big NO... God forbid my parents would ever say: We've got a guy from India whom we would like you to meet...that's off limit and they know it' (Alia).

For Alia, the boundaries her parents have to respect are clear when it comes to her marriage. In not wanting an Indian partner, Alia expresses her wish to have an affinity with her prospective husband along similar class and background. Nazia explains the continuity of this cultural custom as a reaction to how 'westernised' second/third generation of South Asian migrants are becoming; more importantly, her words signify that parents will strategically take measures to 'oppress' children if the latter 'become' 'western':

'They bring in the culture from Pakistan in arranging such marriages... it's their culture which is being westernised here and parents here don't want their kids to lose it...so it is protective mechanism, the more western you try to become, the more oppressive your parents will be, so if you resist it, you have power' (Nazia).

Indeed, the older generation insists on maintaining 'the culture'. Nevertheless, as young women contest such notions, resistance on their part brings about new formulations of culture. As shown, respondents do not necessarily reject or obliterate cultural heritage, but are keen to embrace a more fluid, up-to-date notion of South Asian Muslimness.

Among unmarried women, only two respondents suggest that they 'do not mind' transnational arranged marriages, as opposed to the majority, who believes that they are problematic. However, my findings do not correlate with Shaw's and Charsley's (2006) sample, which found that British Pakistani women prefer husbands from the subcontinent as they are more responsive to cultural and religious adherence, as opposed to British Pakistani men. For Rashida, a transnational marriage is not an issue; on the contrary, suggesting that divorce is higher among couples who were both raised here, Rashida questions the fact that having the choice does not always lead to better marriages. Habibah and Abida also raise key concerns:

'I don't mind because I speak both languages, don't mind whether he's British or Pakistani, but the girls here, they want to get married to British guys but the divorce level is really high in them, they end up getting married to a Pakistani guy anyway so you might as well just go for it the first time' (Rashida).

'They need to be aware of how this society works and I can't have someone from abroad and just expect me to behave like how they would expect their wives to behave in Bangladesh which is they have to stay at home... I'm fine with somebody coming from abroad but I won't change my ways' (Habibah).

'I don't think it's right as differences clash, a woman here goes 'I'm off to work', and he's like 'why are you going to work, that's my job, people will talk'. But she'll say 'No, I want to be independent, this is the way I've always done it. It wouldn't work, a woman who's been brought up here, educated means she will go into a career and then a man comes along and takes all that away, this is the west you know, they can't do that' (Abida).

Nevertheless, young women show their concerns towards such matches. Habibah is open to the idea of marrying someone from Bangladesh, as long as he does not infringe on her independence, a right that British women in the West benefit from. Opposing cultural differences, Eastern versus 'Western' ideals of womanhood, Abida agrees with Habibah, but is not convinced that such marriages work as gendered expectations remain at diverging ends. Consequently, Abida fears that her identity as an 'educated' woman is put at risk through such matches; for her, hence, cultural compatibility remains extremely significant.

'A lot of the girls agree to marry someone from Pakistan and they'll apply for their visa and get their stay and it is helping the family out but once they get their stay, they can divorce them. I know two people in my family who have done this and now they're divorced but the guys are British citizens now, so I won't ever agree to it' (Saeema).

Saeema underlines another issue with transnational marriages; marriage and migration remain inextricably linked, as Shaw's and Charsley (2006) study has widely documented how familial links are maintained through transnational marriage arrangements. Saeema denounces this principle, used by families to 'help' each other and maintaining tight cultural links between them. Her concerns are justified in her not only personally knowing members of her family who are today divorced due to transnational marriages, but also highlights the potential risks which women face if they agree to such matches. Young women like Saeema are therefore not ready to approve of this practice and demonstrate their unwillingness to view marriage merely along migratory purposes. Indeed, having a right to choice of marriage partners when negotiating the practice of marriage appears to be a general concern for research participants. Nevertheless, like I argued in the previous discussion, unmarried respondents' expectations remain somewhat different from their realities. Indeed, processes of 'choice' are not straightforward. As this section has demonstrated, choice of marriage partners is informed by negotiations around future partners' ethnic background, allegiance to Islam, as well as educational levels. These remain significant factors which participants have to consider as they negotiate 'choice' in marriage. In the next section I extend these themes by focusing on cousin marriages in British South Asian Muslim communities.

6.3.4 'I won't marry my cousin'

Previous studies have shown that in British South Asian Muslim communities arranged transnational marriages are often consanguineous marriages (between first cousins) used to strengthen kinship networks between families residing in the home country and the country of adoption (Shaw, 2000; Shaw and Charsley, 2006). More recently, the media has been paying attention to why cousins marry in British South Asian Muslim communities so

as to expose the health risks (genetic defects) associated with marrying consanguineously (*Dispatches*, Channel 4 Documentary, August 2010), and also raise the point that cousin marriages act as barriers for effective integration of ethnic minority groups (*The Sunday Times*, March 2010). I hence asked respondents about their positions on cousin marriages, and why they think such practices are viewed as taboo by the rest of British society. From my research sample, ten respondents' parents are first cousins; they are all of Pakistani origin. No married women in this research had a cousin marriage but among them, only three participants maintain that cousin marriages can in effect be considered, while the rest disagrees with the practice, regarding it as 'backwards'. Basit's (1997: 83) study showed similar trends, with only a few of her respondents thinking that marrying a cousin could be 'advantageous' in terms of providing security to women.

'Cousin marriages, it's fine, it's allowed in our religion, it's allowed in our culture, my parents were cousins but people see that as problematic as it's just what their society values and this has come back from history, traditionally been that way for the West, like aristocratic families...but they forget it' (Faiza).

Faiza criticises British 'western' society for 'forgetting' that cousin marriages were once part of their social fabric; for her, culture and religion dictate social practices where within Islam traditions, it is not technically wrong to marry a cousin. However, in my research sample, most educated women have expressed their concerns about cousin marriages, even though the practice is still considered by some women nowadays. As Shazia's words indicate below, the next generation is keen to maintain the tradition, whereby education does not seem to be making a huge difference in changing mindsets:

'Cousin marriages are plain wrong. My parents are cousins, but I'm against it. But the next generation, the girls I know, they're still considering getting their kids married off to each other and they've been to uni. It's about keeping it in the family and that's backwards' (Shazia).

For Bushra, of Indian origin, cousin marriage is a 'Pakistani' custom and is hence an 'ethnic', not an Islamic custom:

'A lot of Pakistani families, they only get married within the family and it's absolutely ridiculous and they don't understand the problems that arise from it. It's more of a Pakistani thing...I don't think Indians do it. It's not an Islamic thing that you have to do but it's not sinful either, it's completely allowed, but it's not a religious thing that says that it's good if you do' (Bushra).

Faiza and Bushra both draw on the dubious status that cousin marriages hold in Islam; they are permitted but they are not absolutes. The fact that women are aware that the practice is not religious provides them with arguments to challenge the older generations' perspectives on cousin marriages. Nevertheless, some respondents find the practice to be positive, albeit

upon certain conditions. For instance, Haleema maintains that cousin marriages can be considered as long as they are not transnational marriages:

'I've experienced it first time with my parents, it was love first and then arranged so I think that way is ok but in terms of the way it happens is if they're living on different sides of the world and I'm over here and there's a cousin back home, show her a few photographs and I don't agree with that... I've seen so many marriages that break down because of cultural differences, so there are nuances in cousin marriages' (Haleema).

Indeed, talking about love cousin marriages, she reiterates that it is important that partners 'love' first, before agreeing to the match as 'cultural differences' between partners may ruin a marriage. Indeed, young women are developing individualistic notions of such 'traditional' practices, suiting their needs and demands. Cousin marriages are generally arranged marriages. However, this research demonstrates that participants are ready to consider arranged marriages but remain wary of cousin marriages. All single respondents are adamant that they will not marry their cousins. Three respondents had proposals from first cousins; Farha was engaged to her cousin for six months but decided to break it off, while Sadia and Sanaa turned down two offers. The majority of respondents claim that they do not agree with cousin marriages due to them having 'brotherly' relationships with their cousins, as well as the huge potential medical risks involved as far as children are concerned.

Saeema expresses frustration, to the point of disgust, when reflecting on the practice. As she maintains:

'They happen all the time. I don't agree with cousin marriages but my parents are cousins... cousins have married, and three of their kids have passed away but they just don't listen... it's honour, izzat, like they'll say 'this family is going to look back on us, and the community, we want to keep that good name'...cultural not religious...they'll say 'you're going to go to hell because you're not doing this' and I say 'where in the Qur'an does it mention that!?' It's like you making your own religion then'

It's decided before they're even born, they grow up together and it's sick. It's that messed up mentality where for fifteen years of your life, this guy is your brother, next two years, you can't speak to him, and then he's your husband, it's disgusting (Saeema).

For her, the South Asian societal concept of 'izzat' is undermining young people's lives, whereby Islam is used to threaten them so as to ensure that they are made to accept the practice on the basis of religion. Clearly, women are making choices and re-negotiating the transnational arranged marriage practice, where they reveal an agency to erect certain boundaries which will largely affect the nature of marriage in their communities. As this section reveals, respondents maintain that they would not agree to a cousin marriage;

clearly, respondents are demarcating arranged marriage from cousin marriage, where it is obvious that there are limits to them agreeing to an arranged match by their families. It appears that participants are successful in this approach as married women in my research did not have cousin marriages, whilst two respondents categorically disregarded their offers whilst one broke off her engagement to a cousin. Indeed, this confirms that they are evaluating their ‘choice’ of marriage partner within the arranged marriage process by evaluating boundaries. In the last part of this section, I discuss the significance of consent in marriage, which remains integral to the arranged marriage practice. In effect, I explore the notions around consent in order to show how respondents erect and maintain boundaries within the marriage process, thereby further illustrating their negotiations of the practice of marriage within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain.

6.3.5 Grey areas: ‘arranged’ versus ‘forced’ marriage

Studies of arranged marriages have focused on ethnicity, ‘race’ and migrant populations in Britain, where the relevance and significance of such practices as a substantial method to ensure cultural continuity within ethnic groups remains prevalent (Afshar, 1989; Alibhai-Brown, 1993, Lewis, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Ballard, 1994; Bhopal, 1997; Labi, 2003). More importantly, the issue of ‘forced’ marriages in the UK has been the object of growing concern for the government for the last decade. The term ‘forced’ marriage, meaning arranged marriage in which consent is apparently absent, remains a somewhat complex issue. As Alia highlights, perceptions have been tainted by the confusion made between ‘arranged’ and ‘forced’ marriages in Britain:

‘It’s about what people understand by arranged marriages and forced marriages...so if by arranged marriage we mean the introduction of boy and girl there’s nothing wrong with it. It’s just a means of meeting somebody...at the end of the day the decision is with the girl. For me arranged marriage in British context it could be a friend saying let’s go out for dinner, I know this guy and you could click so that is similar, like a helping hand! And it’s done by everyone but they don’t realise it’ (Alia).

Ironically, for her, girls are empowered as they remain decision makers in the process. She draws parallels between arranged marriages in a western context, which is no different from people of other ethnic groups (non-South Asian) ‘setting up’ common friends. Alia therefore denounces the stereotypical stigmas associated with arranged marriages, which have been essentialised by British society, as documented by Alibhai-Brown (1993). In fact, the Home Office report (2000) distinguishes ‘forced’ from ‘arranged’ marriages on the basis of consent. It defines ‘arranged’ marriages as “consent given and sought by both parties”. It describes ‘forced’ marriages as “conducted without the full consent of both parties”, which can involve “emotional pressure to force someone to accept the arrangement”. Nowadays, in

the UK, it is a legal offence to 'force' someone into a marriage and legislation prosecutes parents who attempt to do so (*BBC News Online*, November 2008). More recently, the case of a teenage British Muslim girl 'sold' by her father into an arranged transnational marriage in Pakistan for ten thousand pounds in exchange for the future husband obtaining British citizenship has sparked controversy, where it is being suggested that the school curriculum in Britain will have to mandatorily address the forced marriage issue so as to raise awareness among young women (*BBC News Online*, February 2011).

My research participants acknowledge differences between arranged and forced marriages and for them, consent also accounts for the differences between the two. None of them are ready to accept a 'forced' marriage as opposed to an 'arranged marriage'. Similarly, Basit (1997: 75) found that her participants did not find the arranged marriage to be 'an unreasonable or oppressive custom' as long as consent was obtained from the young people concerned. My previous research (Abdool Raman, 2005) conducted on South Asian educated women in Mauritius demonstrate that women also make a distinction between forced and arranged marriages. However, Macey and Beckett (2001) use the term 'forced arranged' marriage to demonstrate the fluidity of the two concepts, which is more appropriate to define 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages as one practice involving the use of physical or non-physical force. Ahsan (1995) also suggests that there is growing evidence in Britain of women's suppression in these marriages as this practice, whether called 'forced' or 'arranged', involves the exertion of varying kinds of pressure and harassment. An 'arranged' marriage can be a 'forced' marriage when someone is 'obliged' and 'coerced' to say 'yes' to an engagement due to ethnic, patriarchal, traditional and cultural 'values' of one's community in which they do not have free choices to make their own decisions. It is hence important to question the suitability of the Home Office's distinction between arranged and forced marriages, and develop a new language that could further investigate the issue of consent and choice in arranged marriages. Indeed, Anitha and Gill (2009) also explore the distinction between 'arranged' and 'forced' marriage by focusing on British legal and policy discourses, where they state that: 'the difference between arranged and forced marriage continues to be framed in binary terms and hinges on the concept of consent' (Anitha and Gill, 2009: 1).

Previous research (Gangoli *et al.*, 2006; Samad and Eade, 2002; Bredal, 2005) demonstrates that British South Asian women are negotiating the grey areas around consent in marriage. In so doing, they negotiate community/family concerns as well as assess their individual perspectives on the consequences of agreeing or refusing a marriage proposal. This leads them to re-work established gendered norms (daughters having to agree to arrange marriage) through their navigations of choice and constraint. Likewise, my

respondents also portray a clear awareness of firstly, whether arranged and forced marriage should be distinguished from each other, and secondly, how problematic it is to inherently rely on consent to demarcate these practices, if ever it is possible to totally differentiate between them:

'Forced for me is having no choice in the matter whatsoever...just that fact that it's not your choice and you haven't made an informed decision... it's not your decision to say yes or no as the parents have made this decision for you' (Alia).

'They are completely different. Arranged marriages, there's nothing forced about them generally. They are just simply an introduction from the family rather than through friends or yourself...that's the only difference, getting you to meet someone and asking you to decide...like a month or so should be enough' (Farha).

Shabana highlights the subtlety in her experiences of having had an arranged marriage, which could have easily turned into a forced marriage, hence demonstrating the slippery slope that links the two:

'Arranged marriage is how I got married...there was one guy in my family and I said no, my parents said no but my sister was pressing my mum and in the meantime the guy got engaged to someone else and my sister said she was going to talk to him and if that had happened, that would have been a forced marriage...no choice...it's about choice and the choice they give you and in my case, I had the choice' (Shabana).

Many participants also point out that without consent, a marriage is not Islamically valid as 'Islam gives one the right to freely choose a partner' (Haleema). As Sadia states, 'you need an explicit consent, that's an arranged marriage, and that's ok in Islam'. Indeed, Pearl and Menski (1998), writing on British Muslim marriages from a legal perspective, have always emphasised the importance of consent in the Islamic marriage. As Bushra explains:

'A forced marriage is not allowed in Islam because you have to agree, and if you have a forced marriage, it doesn't count anymore. It's about intentions, everything is in Islam, if in your heart you don't want to marry the guy and if you say it just to please anybody else but you don't mean it, then God knows that' (Bushra).

Nevertheless, some participants maintain they personally know someone among their extended family or friends who have been forced to get married, revealing that the occurrence of forced marriages in South Asian Muslim communities in Britain remains significant. Respondents express their awareness that a grey area or a 'fine line' separates the two, where consent remains a complicated issue to rate or define. For Shazia, even forced marriages can be sub-divided into 'types', which goes back to the idea of grey areas and varying degrees as consent is negotiated in marriage:

'There are different types of forced marriages. There's one where they're dragging them physically, then there's when they are emotionally blackmailing you. Emotional blackmail is a type of pressure...arranged can come from so much pressure. My housemate, they're forcing her. She's got her boyfriend and her family won't accept him' but I'm like 'you've got a choice' but they're threatening to kill themselves and this is happening next door, right here' (Shazia).

She reiterates the impact that 'emotional blackmail' may have on young women's decisions to go through with an arranged marriage through *coerced consent*. Even if one thinks one has a choice, the difficulty of young women taking formal actions against their families remains an issue. In saying that 'this is happening next door', Shazia reflects on her housemate's current situation; the latter is being forced into an arranged marriage whilst she is in a committed relationship with her 'boyfriend', a situation which her family will not accept. If she refuses to go ahead with the marriage, her parents' have threatened to 'kill themselves'. This demonstrates the challenges faced by women to resist emotional blackmail and affirm a right to 'choice'.

Interestingly, in Lubaina's case, an arranged match potentially becomes 'forced' when her power to decide whether the match suits her or not is taken away from her; 'you're forcing your view on me because you're not asking me':

'There's a very fine line between arranged marriages and forced marriages. I had a proposal and she didn't ask me, she'd already made her mind up that he wasn't the right guy and I thought that's really towards forced. You're forcing your view on me because you're not asking me whether I like him or not. When I said no to her about one of my relatives she wanted me to agree, she said 'No doubt they'll think that you've got a secret relationship going on, that's why you said no, your reputation will be questioned' How can you ever win?' (Lubaina).

Whilst deciding not to go ahead with another proposal which her mother hoped she would say yes to, Lubaina's decision is rebuked on the grounds of honour, remitted into question through the potentiality of 'secret relationships'. Women may hence find themselves in delicate situations, almost trapped or manipulated to say yes or no to arranged matches. Consent, for Lubaina, must not therefore echo double standards on the part of parents but should be a constant or fixed notion that reflects a categorical 'yes' or 'no' from women. The issue of force and consent has previously been addressed by feminists in relation to sexuality and domination. These studies help illuminate notions of choice and consent in forced and arranged marriages. For instance, Jeffreys (1993) links the 'construction of consent' to the politics of sexuality in coercive sex and marital rapes. In these cases, the notion of consent based on equality and free will is not valid as both are acts of male sexual dominance which are supported by social institutions such as marriage. Through dominance, the notion of coercion as a strategy used in disempowering women is carried out through the use of manipulation or emotional pressure (Phillips, 2000: 15-19). More relevant to my

study, Anitha and Gill (2009: 168-171) similarly link coercion and consent within the arranged and forced marriage concepts. They interrogate the distinction made between coercion and consent in marriage as per British Courts, where ‘grey areas’ nevertheless, are not theoretically or legally helpful enough to acknowledge that consent remains constructed in discourses of ‘power imbalances and gendered norms’ that women face within South Asian communities. As they point out, social expectations engender the emotional pressure perpetuated at women, and the grey area between arranged and forced marriage ‘may slip onto the other: arranged may become forced but forced is always different from arranged’ (Anitha and Gill, 2009: 171).

This said, two respondents, Rashida and Nazia, in this study believe that there is no difference between a ‘forced’ and an ‘arranged’ marriage:

‘Even in arranged marriages if you say no, your parents may just say tough and will that be classed as a forced marriage? Is there a difference? I don’t think so. I think it’s the same’ (Rashida).

‘Arranged marriages are modified versions of forced marriages because the only difference between the two is pictures are shown, you can speak to the guy whereas a forced marriage, it’s just so simple: you are forced to get married. You are manipulated by your parents so that you do what they want you to do. I don’t think it is about choice. My cousin had an arranged marriage but the only difference in that being a forced marriage was that in her arranged marriage, she was asked whether she wanted to marry the guy but what I don’t understand is why do you ask? Technically, she couldn’t exactly say no. An arranged marriage is a forced marriage in disguise...same...because you can’t distinguish between the two; an arranged marriage is a nicer way of saying forced marriage’ (Nazia).

Nazia is strongest in her condemnation of arranged and forced marriages, which for her remain essentially the ‘same’. Throughout her responses, Nazia has consistently reaffirmed how patriarchy operates in South Asian households, which is indicative of the fact that Nazia, although from a middle-class background, has personally experienced patriarchal control at home when she imparted the struggles she faced to not only go to university, but to also live away from home, an issue I discussed earlier (Chapter Four). From the beginning, Nazia made it clear that if she did not go down the educational route, she would have been ‘forced’ into an ‘arranged’ marriage. As a strategy, Nazia has found it easier to live independently, in spite of her parents’ disapproval. For her, ‘forced’ and ‘arranged’ marriages remain patriarchal ‘cultural’ institutions in which women are trapped within the private sphere. Her thoughts echo Anitha and Gill’s (2009: 172) argument which suggests that although ‘reluctant’ consent and ‘psychological pressures’ are legally recognised as coercion to marry, the ‘patriarchal structures remain unexplored beneath this facade of an individual ultimately free to choose and to change her mind’. Indeed, women feel *obliged* to conform to such marriages; as Nazia reiterates, ‘she could not technically say no’. In such

familial spheres, women's 'consent' to participate in 'traditional' practices is encompassed within patriarchy. This is reflected in women's negotiations of arranged matches, which are embedded in a cultural context of coercion, established throughout their gendered experiences (Phillips, 2000). Women hence *learn* to 'accept' marital customs which operate within a culture of patriarchal force where 'free' choices remain limited.

This section has therefore demonstrated that whilst respondents negotiate the practice of marriage, significant issues are considered by participants. First, they re-negotiate pre-marital relationships as they develop their own personal ways to maintain boundaries which are in accordance with their Islamic faith (for instance, limited physical relationship with their partner before marriage). Second, they are ready to challenge the gendered cultural norms of a daughter-in-law having to reside with her in-laws after marriage as they demonstrate their unwillingness to support the extended family pattern which is considered the norm in South Asian Muslim communities. Also, they reiterate that they would promote a more equitable distribution of household chores by contesting the traditional female role of 'homemaker' within their household, while, in contradiction to such an approach, respondents intend to revert to these roles once they start raising a family. In essence, participants maintain that it is important for them to have options to alter their lifestyles (negotiate employment) when they get married. However, I have also illustrated some of the challenges involved as respondents negotiate marriage. Indeed, this is brought into focus through married respondents' experiences of marriage as it is evident that there is a gulf between unmarried respondents' expectations of marriage and the marital realities of married respondents. Third, respondents have shown how their attitudes towards 'choice' of marriage partner are embedded within issues around ethnicity, Islam and the customary cultural tradition of arranged marriage. Their navigations of whom to choose as a life partner reflect that decisions are informed by degrees of negotiating choice and consent in marriage; for example, arranged marriage as a concept could be considered whilst cousin marriage is rejected by most respondents. As far as forced marriage is concerned, all participants voice against it as most of them view it as being different to an arranged marriage in the sense that consent to marry is clearly absent as the match is being arranged. In the final section of this chapter, I look at how the *nikah*, a religious contract in Islamic law, informs Muslim women's perspectives of marriage, and their choices when it comes to framing Islamic marriage in Britain. This provides us with a clearer perspective on respondents' positionings of marriage as they navigate Islamic and British perspectives.

6.4 FRAMING ISLAMIC MARRIAGE

In this final section, I explore the ways in which respondents are negotiating the ‘act’ of marriage and consequently, how they outline the contours of the Islamic marriage in Britain; their views signal their negotiation processes as they evaluate Islamic and English perspectives of marriage. This analysis provides an insight into how respondents, through contestations and constructions of Islam and marriage, exercise agency as they consider marriage in Islamic and English law. In navigating between the *nikah* and registry, they embrace two separate legal systems (Shari’a law and English law), which intersect as processes of negotiation take place. Precisely, I stress the gendered implications for women as such negotiations of marriage occur, as well as evaluate the possibilities and limitations respondents experience through their re-workings of marriage. Pearl and Menski (1998) have previously researched the legal intersection of these two systems and documented the compromises made, as well as the controversies experienced by British Muslims so as to satisfy both; a religious *nikah* in Britain is not legally recognised unless it is registered by the state (Bradney, 2000). Consequently, this gives rise to the blended concept of ‘Angrezi (English) Shari’a law’, where Muslims navigate to sustain affinities between Islamic and English law (Pearl and Menski, 1998).

Nonetheless, it is also possible that Muslims get ‘stuck’ in between ‘Islamic’ and ‘British’ systems as marriage and divorce laws diverge considerably; I therefore interrogate this opposition to analyse women’s positions within it. In negotiating Islamic principles such as *nikah*, *talaq* and polygamy in Britain, I suggest that Muslim women are actively setting boundaries as they evaluate the possibilities and limitations of fully embracing Islamic ideals of marriage. My respondents portray a range of positionings as they contest the ideals of the Islamic marriage and its stipulations. More specifically, they actively engage in discourses of gender equality, hence raising the question of patriarchy as the contradictions of *nikah*, *talaq* and polygamy become evident through their contestations. El Sadaawi (1981: 214-15) uses the term ‘Islamic patriarchy’ to indicate that ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’ patriarchy are intertwined in matters of *talaq* and polygamy, whereby male supremacy remains apparent in the Islamic marriage. The question remains: does the *nikah* safeguard women’s aspirations of gender equality? In Britain, as the opposition ‘Islamic’ versus ‘Western’ is heightened because participants are having to make ‘choices’, the challenges involved in making their choices illustrate the tensions that exist in framing Islamic marriage.

6.4.1 Nikah in Britain

I started by asking participants whether the nikah and the civil registry were equally important to them, and why, so as to firstly, evaluate the significance they attribute to each legal system and secondly, assess the extent to which the nikah constitutes an important element in shaping respondents' religious identities. Women's views vary, depending on their religious inclinations. All married respondents have had their nikahs registered; only one does not believe that the registry was necessary as for her, marriage in the British context has lost popularity as cohabitation has become the norm in British society:

'The registry is just paperwork to say that you are married, and practically it's not even needed here. I could just say I'm cohabiting and it wouldn't mean anything. There are some financial advantages to being married, that's it' (Sabina).

Two respondents had transnational marriages and got married in Pakistan, whereby their status as being legally married is recognised in the UK:

'I've brought him over, it's classed as a marriage so I don't have to marry him here and I signed everything there and I made an application to the British embassy and that makes our marriage British, it's definitely the religious aspect, the nikah is more important than the English version' (Rahila).

However, all unmarried respondents maintain that they would do both the nikah and the registry. Nevertheless, although the nikah, like the civil registry, is a contract under Islamic law, only three respondents pinpoint the similarity between the two, as opposed to the rest of respondents, who make a distinct difference between them; religious versus secular ceremonies, whereby the registry usually stands as a formality for them. Indeed, Farha suggests that:

'The nikah is religious but it's a contract. It's got no vows, you're not making promises; you're signing a document in black and white. In Islamic states, it's civil so already part of a legal system, girls need to realise this here as well, but it's only different as they are not integrated into one' (Farha).

Farha explains the similarity between the two from a legal perspective. As a lawyer, Farha reiterates that one should not make any difference as the nature of both is contractual. Due to the absence of 'vows' and 'promises', Farha concentrates on the civil nature of the nikah, which connotes a more legal, as opposed to religious, view of the nikah. Interestingly, for Fatimah, who also views the nikah as a 'legal document', not proceeding with the registry in England would mean that she is not fulfilling her Islamic faith; not only do both stem out of contractual principles, it is a duty in Islam to adapt to the laws of the country:

'If it's the law then I will do it and you have to get registered, it's more political, it's a legal document that you have to sign, by nature they're the same, nikah is the legal document in Islam, but registration is a legal document according to the

country that you're in and if you're living in that country then it is obligatory on you to accept their laws, that's what Islam says, so you have to do both' (Fatimah).

This therefore demonstrates that for some participants, there is no contradiction, hence opposition, between the two.

'The nikah gives me the right to stipulate what I want and he has to respect it if agreed. I would ask that I should be allowed to work after marriage and earn my own money. I'll write it in the nikah, it's my right' (Lubaina).

Lubaina does not formally use the word 'contract' when she talks about the nikah. However, the principle she puts forward to claim a right to financial independence in a marriage contract emphasises what Farha and Fatimah argue earlier; the nikah can also be presumed to a legal document. Nevertheless, the majority of participants in this research state that the nikah would be more 'important' to them if they had to choose; hence portraying the centrality that Islam has within women's attitudes towards marriage. Ahsan's (1995) study of educated Muslims in Britain has demonstrated that for them, the nikah has more relevance, although they realise the importance of a civil marriage legally. In my study, only a few women maintain that the nikah and the civil registry are 'equally important' to them, although for the majority, the nikah would still come first if they had to choose. Clearly, religion influences women's understandings of marriage, defining marriage as a 'sacred' as opposed to 'secular' or 'western' institution, as highlighted by the quotes below:

'They are both important but if there was a choice then the nikah would come first, but for now, equally important' (Faiza).

'In terms of making it halal, the nikah is important but because I'm British I think they would be equally important, so make them equal, have the same number of guests and have the same effort put into it but the nikah would always come first for me, it's the sacred aspect of it' (Haleema).

'The nikah is what would make me think 'I'm married'...signing the registry, wouldn't mean 'I'm married'. If you are religious, then nothing comes before that whereas if you're too western, like secular, then probably an English wedding would be just fine' (Nazia).

Indeed, respondents do recognise their British identity, hence the importance of having the registry, albeit symbolically. Nonetheless, Nazia highlights that perspectives will differ as one needs to balance religious versus secular. However, Hanah maintains, the importance she attributes to the nikah must be understood within her current 'context', which is 'western'. Therefore, for her, both remain inextricably linked:

'The registry, extremely important, my nikah would be important so both of them and I couldn't pick one... I do honestly believe both as one is my religion and the other is the society where I live, my context is western' (Hanah).

Only two respondents claim that the registry would be of more significance to them:

'Registry would be more important...if he is Muslim I would do the nikah, otherwise no...What's in State law, that's it, secular principle this is what counts here' (Sanaa).

'I would do both but I would do the nikah more for my parents. The document you sign in England I find that to be more worthy cause with your nikah, the guy could quite simply just say talaq and you're divorced... English papers it's more official and you've got to do more so as to be divorced from someone, it looks more serious' (Rubina).

Sanaa and Rubina profess a more 'secular' approach to marriage. The 'official' legal attributions remain attractive to Rubina as she highlights the problems that may arise from Muslim divorces. Indeed, this seems to be a concern for some young women in this research. Among participants, only a minority recognises the importance of ensuring that one is legally married in Britain so as to counter such difficulties. The registry, for Sanaa and Rubina, acts as proof that they are married and more importantly, acts as security against divorce in their communities. By 'divorce', Muslim women refer to talaq (Islamic divorce), the tradition that provides Muslim husbands with the right to divorce their wives through repudiation. In the next section, I concentrate on respondents' perspectives on talaq into more detail as this analysis reveals firstly, their awareness of the controversy of talaq, and secondly, reflects respondents' views on how they perceive gender status and rights between wives and husbands in Islam.

6.4.2 Talaq: perspectives on female repudiation

As indicated by respondents like Rubina, divorce for young Muslim women appears to be an area of contention when it comes to women's rights in Islamic law. Talaq, known as female repudiation, is also not recognised as legally valid in British jurisdiction (Bano, 1999). The thorny issue, however, remains that for Muslim women, talaq can only be given, (and accepted in the case of women asking for it), by husbands for it to be valid under Islamic law (Doi, 1992; Dahl, 1997). The gender bias is hence evident as Islamic divorce laws appear to be in favour of men, thereby promoting patriarchy which leaves women powerless (Mernissi, 1993; Moghissi, 1999). In British law, both wives and husbands have equal rights to ask, and be granted a divorce, as opposed to Islamic law. Pearl and Menski's (1998) study has demonstrated that it is therefore possible that Muslim women get 'stuck' in between legal systems as they negotiate divorce with their husbands; the latter may refuse to give talaq, hence obliging his wife to Islamically stay married to him, even though she is granted a legal divorce in English law.

I thus asked respondents about their opinions on talaq, and whether they consider Muslim husbands to have the inherent right to repudiate their wives in Islam. This analysis throws light on whether respondents convey as much significance to the Muslim talaq as

they do the nikah. Undoubtedly, the former raises vital questions around firstly, Muslim women's human rights in Britain and secondly, whether they are aware of the legal problems which may arise in cases where they want to satisfy both legal systems to feel divorced. My findings show that most respondents agree that it is a male right to repudiate their wives in Islam. However, half of my respondents suggest that talaq in this way is only valid when done 'properly' as 'prescribed by Islam', which is, for husbands to pronounce talaq over a period of time of reflection, provide maintenance for the wife, as well as establish pregnancy:

'He has to mean it. There are different interpretations and which one do you go by? The wife has the right to ask for a divorce as well, if you say talaq once and you give time out, there is a period of four months where you can separate to reflect, Islam goes against being hasty whereas in other religions such as Christianity there is no divorce, that's one extreme but Islam gives you the opportunity. The reasons why these cases arise are because the husband and the wife don't know their rights' (Haleema).

'If a woman asks for it then the man should give it, she has the right to divorce and he should agree, if he doesn't give it, then she has the option of going to an imam and divorcing him, it takes longer but God has given her that option but it's true, a man has more of a right, he does have that power to give that whenever he wants and the reason why the man has it is because men are calmer and more restricted than women, women are more free with their tongue and could divorce their husbands everyday, but I don't think a man should exercise his right' (Rahila).

Haleema and Rahila both regard talaq as a husband's inherent Islamic right. However, their differences in opinions reflect how the power relationship between a Muslim wife and husband is understood, accepted and interpreted. Both agree that the wife has a right to divorce but Rahila seems to fully rely on women's biology to explain why they are not given the same right as men. In citing the hadith, Rahila supports the patriarchal concept where a 'man has more of a right' than his wife to initiate, as well as to consent to separation. Nevertheless, Haleema maintains that talaq is 'progressive' as Islam gives both men and women the option of divorce, as opposed to Christianity. However, problems arise as 'rights' are not properly respected by spouses.

'Why should I not have my rights? My husband obviously has. If he can find it so easy to walk away, and I'm left with nothing then I don't think that's fair. So, I would do the registry because it's security for me, English law is security for me' (Asma).

Clearly, for Asma, English law would grant her an equal footing with her husband in divorce matters. Women like Asma rely on British law as 'security' in the advent that she is repudiated (Islamically divorced) by her husband. This shows that even though most respondents have maintained that the nikah will always have precedence over the civil

registration, as far as talaq is concerned, divorce in English law appears to be fairer and quicker than the Islamic tradition.

'No right to do that (talaq)...if anybody does that I'd be like 'I don't know what you're on about, we're still married unless you give me divorce papers', British, legal papers is the marriage, so I would not accept 'I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you' (Sanaa).

Indeed, for most participants, except from Sanaa who is categorical that English laws takes priority over both nikah and talaq, accepting divorce in English law as their primary option will make more sense.

'For me...divorce would mean going down the courts...it's weird! Like the marriage is the nikah and the divorce I think the English way, I would want my freedom as soon as I could...need to ensure the certificate is legal so that women are not trapped as husbands might refuse you to give you the talaq if you ask for it so then you will just have to get divorced the English way and be done with it' (Sadie).

'The difficulty is that you value nikah more but when it comes to divorce, you'd go for the British way because Islamically you have to go to the Muslim Council so I guess you do the registration and in that way have the Islamic divorce but if it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen' (Tasneem).

As these quotes illustrate, the Islamic divorce for Sadie and Tasneem would be regarded as a bonus, although in theory, Islamically, without a talaq from husbands, Muslim women will not be permitted to re-marry under Islamic law. Indeed, as Sadie mentions, following the tradition that a Muslim wife is only granted divorce if her husband consents to it, in effect, husbands may refuse to 'give talaq' and as such, oblige her to stay married Islamically. Therefore, divorce in English law would suffice for these respondents.

Moreover, some participants maintain that talaq remains an 'abused' right, although they still regard talaq as legitimate:

'I've seen women whose blokes have refused to give them the flipping talaq, talaq is abused...for me, say for example I got the religious divorce and then he was refusing to sign the divorce papers and then I met somebody else without having had the legal divorce, I would Islamically marry him, even though it would be bigamy if you think about it! But because the religious marriage is more important to me, then the religious divorce would too' (Alia).

'Legally it's posing a huge problem...happening to my friend. She wants a divorce, but he won't give it. He's gone and got married again, and she can't get married and she's British. She's stuck, she's quite religious and in my eyes and hers, the talaq is divorce, but it's just the way that it's done...it's not fair' (Shazia).

Alia explains why talaq is the more important concept; like the nikah, the Islamic divorce for her would have more value, despite the fact that she acknowledges that it is 'abused' by Muslim men. More importantly, she would be technically committing bigamy (albeit seen as cohabitation under English law but marriage under Muslim law) if she decides to re-marry

without obtaining a formal divorce under English law, demonstrating how contradictory the issue of divorce is for young British South Asian Muslim women. Shazia echoes Alia's concerns as she reiterates that women are 'stuck' in between legal systems. Nevertheless, she accepts that religiously, talaq is crucial for married women who wish to get re-married, therefore tilting the onus of power upon the Muslim husband.

To others, however, female repudiation is not considered Islamic and some women strongly believe that this method of divorce is questionable and should therefore be made obsolete:

'This is a traditional cultural practice and it shouldn't be practised anymore...there's a human way to do it. I think it's being abused as the wife doesn't have that right to exercise, it doesn't mean to say you can abuse that right' (Nazia).

'The notion that a man will give you a divorce three times, to me, I'm sorry that's bullocks, I don't believe in that, there's a more humanistic approach and that's what I value' (Hanah).

Farha, at the time of interview, was practising law in Pakistan (Lahore) as part of her work experience. As an expert on family law, Farha maintains that Muslim women should be given the option to the 'right of divorce' on a document which is legally recognised by state law; in the case of Pakistan, the nikah is considered legal and is therefore easier to implement, as opposed to the UK, where Muslim women are not immune to talaq if they marry under Islamic law:

'Everyone who is getting married, I advise them to get the right of divorce in the nikhanama. It's just a little box you have to tick. It's an option in the contract. The actual talaq doesn't have to be written but religiously speaking, you have to give notice that you are giving talaq, and 90 days later, the divorce comes through...they can't just give talaq and walk away, it's wrong, and here in Britain, if this is done on the Nikah certificate, it would protect women' (Farha).

As a solution to bridge two divergent legal systems, Farha maintains that on Nikah certificates (where some are legally recognised as valid if the imam has state approval to legally officiate marriage), the right of divorce could be included as an 'option' as this could provide women with protection.

'I think you should have equal rights and as easy to divorce each other...my friend married her cousin, but he wouldn't let her work and she's a dentist! She wanted a divorce and it is so hard, she's been trying for the past three years and she needs the Islamic divorce to move on. If they had a box here, it could be so easy, but people won't tick it purely because it looks bad on your family, again same old culture and honour' (Fawzia).

Fawzia's account is a common scenario that respondents in this research illustrate, where the difficulty rests either with husbands repudiating their wives, or husbands refusing to

consent to divorce in cases where wives demand it. Fawzia is not convinced that a 'tick box' would be sufficient to eradicate legal discrepancies; 'culture' and 'honour' (izzat) will irrevocably prevent women from signing as this act could pre-empt conflicts at the very beginning of the marriage. Indeed, as discussed in previous chapters, it is expected of daughters to adhere to gendered cultural norms and behaviour as families' and communities' reputation depends on women's success of upholding community norms.

Ten respondents explicitly express the thought that the rule around talaq is 'unfair' and that Islam should have provided women and men with 'equal' power to divorce each other; interestingly, Mernissi (1987) suggests that divorce by repudiation was done by both genders in the days of early Islam, whereby women gradually lost their rights to do so. Here, respondents question the irrationality of such power imbalance; consequently, Nadia and Mushirah reflect on the Islamic principle that if spouses want to re-marry in a case where talaq has been given without due consideration, the wife has to in effect, marry another man before she is Islamically allowed to re-marry her ex-husband:

'Women should have the same right, talaq, they can ask for it and he has to agree...but women can't give it and for a man to have that much control is scary, one moment of anger he can divorce even if he doesn't mean it, then you need to get married to somebody else and sleep with them if you want to get married to the person again' (Nadia).

'Men think they are powerful and the guy who said it literally regretted it because he said it and wanted to take it back and the wife said no I have to marry someone else before I can marry you now, no sense at all' (Mushirah).

Nadia and Mushirah both maintain that the nikah remains their priority; however, they remain aware of the patriarchal nature of Islamic jurisdiction. Indeed, they perceive divorce laws in Islam to be unfair to women as husbands have too much 'power' and 'control' over wives.

As a response to the nature of such complicated debates, I asked research participants whether they believe that Islam provides women and men with equal rights and status, more specifically within marriage. The majority of British Muslim women think that women and men benefit from equal rights and status in Islam, and that this equality must be mirrored in the Muslim marriage:

'In Islam, yes but the culture interferes and it looks like women have no rights, the West going on about how oppressed women are, we have to get the gift from the husband, which is consequent. In Islam your husband has got to provide for you and all the money that you earn is your own money. Is that what they call oppression?' (Shazia).

'It's a man's right to provide and a woman's right to look after the family, if I want something for my house; my husband has to provide it for me. And no questions

asked. I can spend freely of his money however I want to. I think some people, a bit of a modern day thing, think, you're not entitled to his money because in return you look after his kids. He has a right over you but you have a right over him in that whatever you need he provides for you, rights are equal but different, complementary' (Sabina).

Respondents suggest that equality in a Muslim marriage must be understood on the basis that roles are 'complementary' as opposed to 'same'. The dichotomy 'culture' versus 'religion' is again raised, where culture is used to misrepresent religious ideals. This hinders the equal ethos that Islam promotes between husband and wife. Indeed, 'western' notions of Muslim women's oppression are criticised as Shazia defines the responsibilities a Muslim husband must honour.

'Different rights have been given to the man and the woman but they are equal even though they're different. When I earn, if my husband is struggling to pay the bills, it's not my duty, it's a favour upon him to contribute, my money is my money' (Haleema).

Interestingly, in a 'modern' context where women expect an almost equal contribution from partners as far as housework is concerned (discussed in section 6.3 of this chapter), respondents forcefully affirm that their financial contribution towards the household would be 'bestowed as a favour'; in essence, they do not feel any formal obligation to financially contribute to the household. As Haleema states: 'my money is my money'. This research has shown that British South Asian Muslim women strive for financial independence through educational achievements and employment (Chapter Four). However, they intend to apply Islamic principles to their financial status when it comes to marriage. Indeed, contributing 'halfway' to the income household does not appear to be a strategy that young Muslim women would wholeheartedly embrace.

'Sex in the Muslim marriage... some people get married to someone they don't want to and the husband wants it every night but it is rape. But then I was reading up, and sex in Islam means that a husband has a right to ask his wife to have sex because it's part of marriage. If not, there are risks to adultery. And the wife has the same right and her husband is not allowed to say no...so it works both ways, no woman demands it but the woman does have the right to also have it so is it rape?' (Nadia)

Nadia is the only respondent who exemplifies the nature of rights and status of spouses in Islam through a discourse of sexuality. The Muslim wife and husband both have equal rights to demand sex from each other in Islam as this acts as safeguard from adultery (Doi, 1992). Nonetheless, Nadia reflects on the concept of marital rape, which for her, does not and cannot exist in the Muslim marriage as technically speaking, both partners have equal rights to having their sexual needs fulfilled. Recently, a senior Muslim cleric, head of the Shari'a Council in Britain, caused controversy as he stated that 'rape is impossible in a marriage'

(*The Independent UK*, October 2010). Again, this demonstrates the stark opposition of Islamic versus British ideals. In Europe, marital rape is a crime, where non-consensual sex with one's spouse determines 'rape'. In marital rapes, consent, constructed through sexual domination and coercion, has led feminists (Jeffreys, 1993; Phillips 2000) to suggest that women endure 'coercive sex', where they submit to patriarchal violence in marriages. Nonetheless, Nadia defines 'rape' and consent as being contextual; in a Muslim marriage, even though the wife does not 'consent' to sex, her Islamic duty dictates that she has to fulfill her husband's sexual needs as it is his right to demand it. Indeed, sexual abstinence must not exceed a hundred and twenty days, where the validity and success of the Islamic marriage is not only based on the sexual relationship between spouses, but is also reflective of the unequal gender relationship between them (Sabbah, 1984; Bouhdiba, 1985).

This said, a few respondents explicitly claim that in Islam, men have more rights, and greater status over women:

'A woman's ticket to heaven is through her husband...I don't agree but it's like that, doing everything for your husband and when he comes back, not to bother him with your own problems and if he says something to you don't argue back and say sorry even though it's not your fault, then he'll have more respect for you.'

Islam is more in favour of men...no equal rights, doesn't matter how educated you are and I'm saying that because of the way Islam is, a man will always be superior to a woman regardless of his status, of his education or what job he does, it will never change...culturally things have changed, like British women think 'we want to be equal' in status, even higher to their men but Islamically men will always be higher than women' (Rahila).

For Rahila, the notion of women's rights and status in Islam is fixed, and rooted within patriarchal interpretations. Even though she 'does not agree' with such concepts, Rahila is convinced, even resigned, to accept that she depends on her husband, Islamically, to achieve status and 'respect' as a Muslim wife. As she maintains, a woman's educational achievements will not obliterate patriarchy in Islam, as based upon her own personal experiences. Rahila has a higher level of education than her husband, who came to the UK after they married in Pakistan. She has expressed unhappiness with her married life as her husband, without higher education, is unable to relate to her on the same level, or have better employment prospects in Britain. He would prefer for her not to work but Rahila is unwilling to compromise her standard of living so as to 'stay home', which according to her, is prescribed by Islam. More importantly, Rahila does not essentially believe that Muslim women in Britain could ever inherently have equal 'status' and 'rights', even though they are exposed to more egalitarian concepts espoused by British society. Discourses about women's rights for participants are therefore deeply embedded within subjective Islamic notions of power relationships between Muslim women and men, and ultimately between

wives and husbands. Indeed, as my study demonstrates, respondents portray individual notions about gender relationships within a Muslim marriage, thereby denoting independence of thought in assessing and interpreting discourses around gender rights in Islam. I extend this theme of gender equality and status within Islam in the following section by looking at women's perspectives on polygamy; this sheds further light on how respondents engage with the concept of spousal rights within the Islamic marriage.

6.4.3 Contradictions of polygamy: negotiating possibilities and limitations

Along with divorce, polygamy is another area where respondents emphasise the glaring inequality between wives and husbands in Islam. As Sonia reiterates, her Islamic rights could never be equated to that of her husband as far as marriage is concerned:

'Say my situation was that I couldn't have babies (infertile) and my husband could, Islamically he can go get married with my consent and say I give consent and I share my husband...now turn the scenario around, he can't have kids and I can, why doesn't Islam allow me to obtain his consent to get married again? I can't have another man so do they have equal rights?' (Sonia).

'It is a right, it's not in this country but according to Muslim law and obviously a man made up that law, what woman would write that law, saying that she has to share her husband with another woman?' (Sanaa)

Polygamy in Islam has been widely criticised by feminists (Mayer, 1999; Afkhami, 1999) as an inherent 'cultural patriarchal custom', which presupposes the position of the Muslim wife's status as 'inferior' to that of her husband (Engineer, 1994: 52); in return for the care provided by her husband, the wife is expected to obey and surrender to her husband (Doi, 1992). Nonetheless, as Sanaa puts it in her interview, 'what woman would write that law?' thereby explicitly denouncing the patriarchal nature of polygamous laws in Islam. In the context of Muslim women's status and rights in the Islamic marriage, I asked respondents if they believe in Islamic polygamy, and whether they would agree to a polygamous marriage. The majority of respondents think that Muslim men, in theory, have the right to four wives, although they personally would never agree to such a marriage and would prefer divorce instead. Among them, however, three respondents maintain that they understand how polygamy could work if conditions were met, within special circumstances:

'I don't like the idea but if you're going to bring a second wife, it means she has to be more pious than the first one. They have got the right and I can understand why, one woman marrying four men, who's going to know whose kid he is, I would agree to it if there are valid reasons like fancying somebody else cause men are like that and if they're travelling more, then it's allowed and you can work something out but treat them equally, so these conditions are steady, and without them your marriage would not work, if people follow the correct way of polygamy then I think it is ok' (Fatimah).

'People see it as negative. But if you look behind the concept, look at British society today, western society, millions of cases where the husband is cheating or the wife, affairs but polygamy prevents that. How is being adulterous ok and being polygamous, in a halal or good relationship not be ok? If a man and his wife cannot have children, it's not fair that he loves her but he doesn't want to divorce her so he needs to get married to another woman to have children, it's status for the second woman as well, so it's lenient that way, if there are valid reasons for it, then I don't mind' (Haleema).

Fatimah and Haleema illustrate why polygamy can be considered; seen as a positive arrangement, young women understand this practice to be valuable in response to the state of marriage in the 'western' world where marriages break down due to extra-marital affairs. Polygamy is hence considered a better option than engaging in adultery, which in Islam is a sin. In a British context, the concept of polygamy is re-worked by respondents, who are convinced that polygamy is an Islamically 'appropriate' solution to the contemporary challenges posed by British marriages. In an attempt to preserve marriage as an institution, women are strategically re-thinking marital choices as they frame the Islamic marriage in their context.

Historically a pre-Islamic Arabian custom, it is believed that polygamy in Islam and the allowance of just four wives was a progressive move that the Prophet Mohammad introduced as a response to the decadence of Arabian men who owned as many wives, concubines and slaves as they wished (Eposito, 1982; Doi, 1992; Singh, 1992). In that context, it was not patriarchal rule but an improvement of women's status and rights. In fact, for those participants who are strongly opposed to polygamy, they understand the practice of polygamy as being 'contextual' and 'cultural', and hence, part of the social fabric of Arabian society:

'There was a time and place for that back then...take things into context, there was heck of a lot of women compared to men, there were wars. In this day and age, there is absolutely no need for it and they must be able to treat them equally...and you can't help the affections of the heart...so it's an absolute no. I find that very undignified' (Alia).

'Awful...I don't believe in it. At that time, 1400 years ago, it was a polygamist society, it was cultural, and so were many other societies ...then restricting it to four was big, a progressive move and they would have probably fainted on the spot if it were reduced to just one' (Farha).

For respondents like Alia, her current context does not allow for polygamy, notwithstanding the fact that to respect the strict conditions of polygamy remains impossible to fulfill. Moreover, for Alia, being part of a polygamous marriage is 'undignified' for women, hence showing how divergent views can be. Farha agrees with Alia and highlights that Islam did not bring about polygamy. Perceiving the Islamic polygamous rules as 'progressive', Farha understands this aspect of the Islamic marriage as being historically informed, a purely

social phenomenon with no religious ties. This explains why some women are able to categorically reject this practice altogether.

Nonetheless, more than half of my respondents claim that they personally know people (family or family friends) who live in polygamous marriages in British South Asian Muslim communities.

‘Personally, I would never marry a man who is already married to someone but I know Islamically it’s right but the thought of sharing my man...but it’s happening in the community, it’s easy they don’t register anything, especially divorced women get remarried as second wives and they’re young’ (Saeema).

‘Why should he go and get married just because he wants a new wife...or a younger wife...but it’s happening a lot more now. I know men that have gone over and got married again to a younger bride, brought her here, and they’re like 16-20, have kids, so easily done even if it’s not legal here, they just don’t register the nikah and no one would ever know’ (Habibah).

Indeed, if members of British Muslim communities perceive the nikah under Muslim law to be more valid than any legal registration, it is easier for men to firstly, attempt polygamous marriages and secondly, encourage under-age transnational polygamous marriages in Britain. As Paul and Menski (1998) have suggested, if a nikah has not been legally registered, women cannot be protected by English law as there is no record that they have ever been married under English jurisprudence. This remits into question the status of Muslim woman, as well as her rights to gender equality within the Islamic marriage. In fact, raising the link between transnational marriages and polygamy, Habibah and Saeema explain that men particularly prefer ‘younger’ brides so as to have children. This is reflective of Poulter’s (1998) study of transnational arranged marriages involving ‘younger’ or under-age partners where nikahs are conducted by proxy after obtaining ‘consent’, as allowed by Islamic law. Nevertheless, according to Pearl and Menski (1998), the occurrence of such nikahs is rare in Britain as under-age marriages below the age of 16 is prohibited under English jurisprudence, irrespective of one’s religious laws. However, if Muslims choose to rely entirely on Islamic law and not register the nikah then, as Habibah points out, it is ‘easily done even if it’s not legal’, thereby giving rise to polygamous transnational arranged marriages. Through such legal loop holes, Muslims women’s status and gender rights appear to be non-existent.

From my research sample, two respondents are daughters of polygamous marriages and have shared their first-hand experiences of polygamy with me:

‘I’m saying no now but you never know...it depends on how much you love the person. If you got forced to marry that person then that’s different, it’s me you care about but you were forced, especially if it’s a relation, it is difficult to leave a family

member, my mum is a second wife, it's taken us years to get comfortable with this situation...my dad didn't divorce his cousin and he's married to her nikah wise, he was forced but was in love with my mum, but my mum is the registered wife here, so the first wife never had a registered marriage, it's a strange situation

My dad does everything for them and the same with us as Islamically he has to, we now live about ten minutes away from each other, we work because we don't live together. Men having second wives, it's so common but I want a marriage that's normal, where you have one wife and your own kids, polygamy is not normal' (Nadia).

Nadia has expressed the hardship her family has experienced due to the polygamous arrangements she grew up in. Indeed, her personal experiences reflect how forced marriages and cousin marriages arranged by families may in effect give rise to polygamy. Ironically, partners 'in love', who cannot marry find space to live their relationship the 'halal' way, which would be acceptable in their community. So as to marry someone of her choice, Nadia's mother negotiates and adopts Islamic principles. As a Muslim husband, Nadia's father has to 'treat his wives equally' and therefore spends alternate nights with both his families. However, Nadia is adamant that polygamy is not 'normal' married life and has no intention to enter into any polygamous arrangement; for her, the notion of a 'normal' marriage revolves around a couple living together, proving that respondents are contesting the very concept of Islamic polygamy.

At the time of interview, Aisha had just turned down an offer of marriage from a man who already had a wife:

'Yes they do have the right; my dad has three wives so he put us through a lot of grief. My mother is the first wife and the second and third one, they're in Pakistan and he goes back four or five times a year but he just goes to the third one. In Islam you have to treat them equally and he will pay for that on the Day of Judgment, we're nine children, my mum, the second wife and my dad are all first cousins, it's such a mess.

My mum always says make sure you put it down in your mahr that I'm going to state that I don't want polygamy, people write 20 000 pounds in their mahr. I don't want the money. But if I say to my husband I don't want polygamy, he does not have a right over me at all. I was actually proposed by a brother here at uni who was considering polygamy, he already had a wife, I said no and he proposed to one of my friends on my uni course and she said yes and they will have a nikah, it's common you won't believe it' (Aisha).

Reviewing her own experiences of polygamy as negative, Aisha will claim the right to refuse polygamy as 'mahr', the bridal gift which Muslim husbands offer their brides once the nikah is performed. For her, the right to say no to polygamy is worth more than monetary value, demonstrating the extent to which Aisha is against polygamy. More importantly, her experiences reveal that young Muslims in Britain are actively negotiating and entering into polygamous marriages; university campuses seem to be a space where

educated British South Asian Muslims negotiate marriage proposals with people of their own status, educational levels and Islamic ideals. In cases where women intentionally enter into polygamous arrangements, it appears that patriarchy is not an issue as long as they personally believe that polygamy is a 'right' granted to the Muslim husband. However, for women like Aisha, consent to polygamy from the wife ('if I say to my husband I don't want polygamy, he does not have a right over me at all') will determine whether the husband should be granted his 'right' to polygamy. Again, women's *choice* and *consent* to the nikah's stipulations, whether patriarchal in their eyes or not, remains the determining factor reinforcing their rights and status as Muslim women.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on how Muslim women are re-negotiating the institution, practice and act of marriage in Britain. I have shown that marriage remains a significant aspect of respondents' gendered identities. Indeed, my findings demonstrate that for respondents, marriage remains a fundamental institution integral to their faith as marriage remains a religious duty prescribed by Islam. In their case, marital gender relationships, embedded within Islam, is still linked to the institutional aspect of marriage as marriage for them not only signifies a relationship with a partner but is also reflective of an adherence to a religious institution. Indeed, the value attributed to the institution of marriage in Islam is understood by how respondents, along Islamic guidelines, respect boundaries so as not to transgress the limits set by Islam as far as pre-marital relationships are concerned. Moreover, respondents demonstrate an awareness of gender rights as prescribed within the Islamic marriage; for example, participants highlight that they do not have an obligation, as wives, to financially contribute to the household. Also, women reiterate how the issue of consent in Islam remains imperative for a nikah to be valid, hence showing how respondents are navigating the marriage process.

Furthermore, engaging with Islamic and British perspectives on marriage reveals the extent to which participants contest and construct the meaning of Islamic marriage in the British context; respondents' evaluation of gender rights in Islam in the light of issues around talaq and polygamy illustrates that women develop gendered identities in trying to engage with an ethos of equal gender rights within the Islamic marriage. This examination has hence explored the ways in which negotiation processes reflect participants' agency and choices in shaping relational, contextual and individual meanings of what marriage entails; in so doing, they attempt to frame marriage by setting boundaries in how they express 'Islamic' and 'Western' ideals of marriage by navigating between Islamic and British values, which can in effect, be at opposing ends. More importantly, this chapter indicates

that Muslim women are adopting a discourse of gender equality in marriage in order to ensure that their expectations of marriage are met. However, in comparing married respondents' experiences of marriage and unmarried respondents' expectations of marriage, it is clear that the realities faced by married respondents are very different from unmarried women's expectations of marriage.

In assessing the importance that marriage has, as an institution, in respondents' lives, I have, first, demonstrated that even though it remains a vital religious institution for British South Asian Muslim communities, the nature of the institution is evolving as participants contest and construct new gendered identities in marriage. Women exemplify their positionings by setting themselves as 'different' from non-Muslim society with regards to the value they attribute to the institution of marriage. According to respondents, marriage for non-Muslims is representative of 'just a piece of paper'. This analysis has also suggested that institutional changes in marriage within South Asian communities are brought about by the intergenerational differences in gendered expectations which respondents develop as a result of being educated and financially independent (as opposed to women of the previous generation). As such, respondents maintain that although there is a gender bias in how much pressure young Muslim women and men experience from their communities to marry, women, who are expected to marry earlier than men, are resisting these cultural codes by choosing educational and career paths above marriage; in fact, respondents, as compared to their mothers, go above the expected age to marry as they take time to navigate marriage options.

Second, I have emphasised how respondents are re-negotiating the practice of marriage by re-working more equal gendered relationships within marriage. For example, participants' narratives of new gendered expectations as far as domestic chores and living arrangements are concerned are reflective of the extent to which they are contesting fixed notions of South Asian Muslim womanhood in their communities; nevertheless, married respondents' experiences portray the difficulties they face to break stereotypical depictions of gendered female roles as they find themselves shouldering the double burden of work at home and outside the home. This analysis has also stressed how Muslim women navigate 'choice' in pre-marital relationships and maintain 'appropriate' gendered boundaries which inform the very nature of them having 'boyfriends'; as such, their navigations are reflective of how they re-negotiate relationship boundaries prior to marriage. I have also critically reviewed women's negotiations of choice in the marriage process by particularly highlighting how they rate consent in 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages as they struggle to negotiate more agency so as to be able to 'choose' marriage partners. I have, through this analysis, highlighted that the theme underlying my discussions remains patriarchy. Indeed,

challenging cultural practices such as cousin and transnational marriages are illustrative of how ethnicity, religion and patriarchy remain at the forefront of respondents' contestations of marriage.

Finally, I have examined women's negotiations of the 'act' of marriage by assessing how two legal systems, the *nikah* and registry, are understood and rated in importance by respondents. I have argued that marriage ceremonies reveal how women negotiate Islamic and British principles simultaneously, as well as navigate the possibilities and limitations of the Islamic marriage as these two opposing legal systems intersect. Such negotiation processes throw light on the gendered implications for respondents as they engage in discourses of gender equality when it comes to *talaq* and polygamy. Clearly, respondents stress the patriarchal nature of these two practices infringing on Muslim women's rights and status. Indeed, as respondents rely on Islamic law to provide scopes for gender equality between Muslim spouses, the controversies emanating from my discussions around *nikah*, *talaq* and polygamy do not appear to be necessarily fulfilling or safeguarding Muslim women's aspirations of gender equality in marriage. So, the challenges faced by respondents, especially in matters around *talaq*, remain potent; nonetheless, as a response to the difficulties that *talaq* may pose for Muslim wives, participants explain that English law provides them with equal rights to divorce. As such, respondents have highlighted the importance of being legally married (civil) in Britain in order to have this security in place if ever divorce needs to be considered in the future.

As far as polygamy is concerned, in context, some women still perceive polygamy to be a 'viable' option to preserve the institution of marriage in being the solution against adultery and a strategy to marry, albeit Islamically, for 'love'. This shows that although respondents do not perceive it as an ideal arrangement, some are ready to engage with it in order to navigate their marriage options. More importantly, respondents' articulations of contested and constructed negotiations of marriage indicate that experiences and expectations remain highly individualistic. For instance, Farha is confident that Islamic principles such as *talaq* and polygamy remain historical and cultural Arabian practices which have no relevance for Muslim women living in the twenty first century. Others, like Nazia and Hanah, maintain that such practices are 'backward' and have no place in the UK. As for Rahila, she feels that there is little room for change as she believes that Islamic law, although rooted in patriarchy, is set in stone, where 'a woman's ticket to heaven is through her husband'. The multiplicity of views expressed by participants is only indicative of their active negotiations of marriage. Ultimately, it is also reflective of the re-workings of gendered relationships respondents bring about in the Islamic marriage, as well as the individualistic expectations and notions respondents portray as they navigate their options of

marriage. As young women negotiate higher educational and employment spaces, they develop greater independence to navigate marriage. Indeed, they have already asserted independence from their parents in their choices of studying and working. Due to financial independence, they will be in a position to consider divorce in cases where marriages do not work out. Nevertheless, even though respondents' negotiations demonstrate greater independence to navigate marriage, the challenges they face remain tangible.

¹ Faiza was born in Britain and is of Pakistani origin. Her first marriage was arranged to a British Pakistani. She divorced two years later. Her second marriage is a love match, whereby she married a British Bengali.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In this thesis, I explore the enduring significance of marriage as the preferred form of social/sexual relationships for young and educated South Asian Muslim women in Britain. I contend that the relationship between women's participatory rates in education and their agency does not only demonstrate the future positive impacts education has upon young women's lives in terms of financial independence and employment careers. I also argue that choices gained in exploring education and work also influence other life options such as marriage. Increased agency and independence gained from education and work influence women's expectations and perceptions of marriage. In this study, I have attempted to reflect on why marriage is still important for these young women. The crucial point I emphasise is that although these educated young women are not rejecting the institution of marriage, they are nevertheless navigating and resisting dominant communal ethno-religious understandings through their re-workings of marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities. Marriage then becomes the key site within which young women challenge cultural and religious gendered norms so as to embrace and perform new gender identities as new femininities and notions of South Asian Muslim womanhood are generated.

Through empirical research with thirty educated British South Asian Muslim women, I attempted to answer three questions:

1. As young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate spaces like higher education and employment, are new gendered identities generated?
2. To what extent do British South Asian Muslim women develop new understandings of marriage through their experiences of higher education and employment?
3. How are such understandings shaping the negotiations of marriage expectations by British South Asian Muslim women?

Chapter Two presented the theoretical debates relevant to frame my research. I began by demonstrating that the link between education and marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities remains potent. Existing literature has focussed on the educational and employment aspirations of young British South Asian Muslim women but not much attention has been paid to the ways in which the new spaces of education and work have impacted on young women's negotiations and expectations of marriage. I also argued that South Asian women's positionings within educational and employment fields

have been portrayed within racialised discourses, thereby encouraging stereotypical depictions of young women as leaving school post compulsory education so as to marry. This poses questions such as are young women's options or choices of continuing their educational paths affected by marriage? Are they actively navigating their options so as to consider both education (and the potential outcome of employment) as well as marriage? In so doing, are their gender identities evolving? As young women draw on the motivational factors leading them towards education and employment careers, it is clear that these early negotiations will impact upon their future negotiations of marriage; as agency and independence are exercised upon the marriage process, issues such as choice of marriage partner, the decision of when to marry, as well as whether to work after marriage become axes along which young women contest and construct new gender identities as they explore new avenues.

I also discussed the ways in which postmodern and post-colonial feminist theories inform my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiation and articulation of their varying experiences and gendered identities. I have relied on concepts of 'difference' and performativity within feminist theory so as to foreground my analysis of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of education, employment and marriage. Firstly, I examined how women's experiences of gendered identities could be understood through the concept of 'difference' and I acknowledged the significance which discourses of culture, ethnicity and 'race' have in assessing the positions of South Asian Muslim women, and their re-negotiations of gendered identities as they explore higher education and the labour market. I suggested that it is important to go beyond essentialist and racialised discourses (embedded within discourses on ethnicity and religion) so as to acknowledge the diversity of women's social experiences, subjectivities and gender identities (Afshar and Maynard, 1994). As Brah (1993) asserts, the construction of ethnic minority women's identities remains embedded within racialised discourses which inform women's narratives of identity as being unstable and unfixed.

Secondly, in focusing on Butler's (1990) notion of gender identity as performance and Brah's (1996) concept of culture (and the enactment of cultural identities) as 'reiterative performance', I argued that the language of performativity remains useful in informing and defining educated British South Asian Muslim women's re-workings of gender identities within the spaces of education, employment and marriage. I claimed that through increased agency and independence gained within the new educational and employment spaces, young women are empowered to generate and hence 'perform' new gendered identities. Nevertheless, I also highlighted the fact that the performance of gendered identities is also embedded within social, cultural and political constructs. My analysis of educated British

South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities was therefore informed by these two feminist theoretical frameworks, where I contended that first, gendered identities remain embedded within the notion of performance and second, gendered identities are also informed through the diverse experiences of women, hence through 'difference'.

Third, I argued that marriage and the family remain gendered organisations within which women contest and construct new gendered identities as women exercise greater independence over the marriage process. As young women enter the new spaces of higher education and employment, increased independence lead them to re-assess notions of marriage and the family unit, and the gendered relationships within it. As women formulate new expectations of marriage and family, they develop and affirm new gender identities. I also suggested that educated British South Asian Muslim women still view marriage as crucial to their ethnic and religious identities, even though alternatives to marriage (for example, cohabitation) are becoming more and more popular in Britain. As such, marriage acts as an important social institution aiding in the maintenance of ethno-religious identities, hence shaping British South Asian Muslim women's gendered identities. For instance, young women illustrate their navigations of marriage and the affirmation of new gender identities as they actively negotiate consent, agency and choice within the arranged marriage process, thus demonstrating an evolution in their perceptions and expectations of marriage. Finally, in highlighting that young women navigate two intertwining legal frameworks – Islamic law and English law, I suggested that women's attempts to actively re-work notions of marriage are opening up wider possibilities for the re-definition of the institution of the Islamic marriage within British South Asian Muslim communities. Indeed, the discussions I raised about the status of divorce and polygamy in South Asian Muslim women's lives remain important areas of research as they indicate how women are grappling and re-interpreting ideals of the Islamic marriage in Britain.

In Chapter Three, I reflected on the methodological approaches I utilised in this research. Yorkshire and Lancashire were chosen as significant locations of British South Asian Muslims. I used snowballing as the main recruitment strategy on university campuses (Leeds, Bradford and Manchester) as well as through South Asian women's organisations in Leeds. In terms of recruiting strategy, I have reflected on the limitations of this methodology. Firstly, most university students I interviewed were part of Islamic Student Societies and hence, reflect a particular segment of South Asian Muslim university students who were readier to affirm their Islamic identities through for instance, the hijab, attending talks on Islam, as well as organising Islamic events on campus. Secondly, as far as respondents who were in paid employment at the time of interviewing are concerned, my sample did not include women graduates who chose not to go into employment; indeed, all

single respondents were in employment (paid and voluntary), and all married respondents were in full-time paid employment at the time of interview. These parameters clearly shaped my research findings but also reflected a practical approach to gaining a sample of relevant interviewees. As for the methodological tools I used, qualitative individual interviews enabled me to obtain in-depth narratives from respondents, while participant observation aided my understanding of Muslim women's social contexts as they negotiated social spaces such as university settings. I grounded my research within feminist methodologies informing my study; in particular, feminist standpoint theory and the feminist politics of difference were useful in their recognition that gendered identities and knowledge production remain fluid and contextual. This concept supports the argument I emphasised throughout this thesis: women's differing experiences shape their diverse gendered identities. In addition, I acknowledged that the research process is embedded within relationships of power between the researcher and the researched. I hence discussed my positionality in the study, suggesting that my position as an 'insider/outsider' has influenced the research process. For instance, the ways in which research participants presented themselves during the interviews were influenced by their perceptions of the researcher, hence impacting on the research process and data collection. Boundaries of 'sameness' and 'difference' (through dress code, educational level and language) between researcher and researched indicated that participants made decisions about how to 'perform' and relate their experiences in the interviews.

The first empirical chapter (Chapter Four) looked at how British South Asian Muslim women are exploring boundaries as they navigate educational and employment settings. I argued that women's early negotiations with family in order to embrace educational aims are indicative of the ways in which women are exercising independence over their life options; their early negotiations prefigure later negotiations about marriage. More explicitly, their early negotiations could be seen as an evidence of their alternative futures in the sense that they would be more likely to act as independent participants within the marriage process. The interesting finding from this chapter demonstrates that all young women, although coming from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, have to engage with family negotiations in order to pursue educational and ultimately, work careers. Indeed, for some, the decision is about going to university at all while for others, navigations revolve around whether they would live home or away during their university years. Therefore, in pushing gendered boundaries, young women are producing new gender identities as they challenge parental and community attitudes towards higher education and employment within British South Asian Muslim communities. Chapter Four provided a framework for understanding how gendered attitudes towards marriage are changing, and

how these changes are impacting on young women's lives. In particular, the routes and the motivational factors leading respondents to choose to go to university and into employment suggest that financial independence and career prospects are leading women to have greater agency and choice in issues such as when to get married and who to get married to. Not only is marriage being delayed but also, women, through independence and experience gained at university and work (for instance, living independently, earning, being involved in student societies), demonstrate active negotiations as they navigate marriage options and generate new expectations of marriage.

In Chapter Five, I argued that British South Asian Muslim women are managing Muslimness through their negotiations of higher education and employment. As they assert themselves, they develop new gender identities that impact on other future life options such as marriage. In actively and consciously contesting and constructing notions of Muslimness, women are resisting essentialised depictions or stereotypes of Islam in Britain post 9/11 and 7/7. I contended that for respondents, Muslimness is explored through an array of other social identities, notably, citizenship, ethnic, and racialised categories which inform their views and meanings of Islam. Consequently, I showed how women *express* (define) and *perform* (affirm) their identities within spatial environments such as university, the workplace and home. Indeed, women choose to define and affirm their social identities in the terms (such as 'Asian', 'Pakistani', 'British Muslim' or 'British Pakistani') they use, through language and food, as well as through dress codes, which remain significant factors aiding educated British South Asian Muslim women to navigate across their multiple but nonetheless, fluid identities. In this chapter, I stressed that religious identity is prioritised over other social identities. I illustrated this by suggesting that the hijab is increasingly being worn by young Muslim women today as an expression of Islamic identity, while the term 'British Muslim' is utilised by respondents to show that Islam is given priority over ethnic identity. Chapter Five therefore explored how spaces of higher education and employment lead British South Asian Muslim women to generate new gender identities within the context of higher education and employment.

In Chapter Six, I examined how Muslim women are re-negotiating marriage in British South Asian Muslim communities. As women navigate marriage, they are framing or outlining the boundaries of marriage in three ways. Firstly, I argued that they are navigating marriage as *institution*, secondly, as *practice* (gender relationships in marriage) and thirdly, through the *act* (style of ceremony-'nikah' versus registry) of marriage. In essence, I contended that through their re-workings of marriage, young Muslim women are altering gendered marital roles within the institution of marriage in their communities, as well as generating new expectations of marriage. Furthermore, I reiterated that by maintaining that

their positionings on marriage remain 'different' as compared to non-Muslims in Britain, respondents are generating their very own understandings of what marriage entails for British South Asian Muslim women. For example, their perceptions and negotiations of pre-marital relationships, and notions around sexual purity and prescribed modes of behaviour for women in their communities shape the ways in which they negotiate the gendered boundaries around marriage. As young women become assertive in their new gender identities, respondents formulate new gendered expectations of marriage and marital relationships as they demand gender equality in the household (for example domestic work and living arrangements). However, in comparing unmarried respondents' expectations of marriage to married women's experiences of marriage, I exposed the apparent discrepancies which exist between marital expectations and marital realities, thereby denoting that respondents' challenges in their quests for gender equality and status in marriage remain potent. In addition, as women negotiate 'choice' of marriage partners by evaluating practices such as 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages, I have emphasised that it is problematic to make a clear distinction between 'arranged' and 'forced' because of the difficulty in rating consent in marriages arranged by families.

Finally, I argued that the style of marriage ceremony respondents choose to adopt demonstrate how women are further negotiating and framing marriage in Britain. In navigating 'nikah' and 'registry', I highlighted the ways in which young women are further negotiating the marriage process. On one level, I examined how respondents navigate Islamic law and English law as they consider marriage as Muslims, as well as British citizens. On a second level, I focused on women's negotiations of the nikah's stipulations from Shari'a law by focusing on their contestations of talaq and polygamy. Through this analysis, I reflected on how respondents navigate issues around gender rights and the status of Muslim women within marriage. This chapter has revealed how British South Asian Muslim women are re-working Islamic ideals of marriage as they assess the possibilities and the limitations of such negotiations.

This thesis has attempted to uncover how British South Asian Muslim women are negotiating education and employment so as to develop new gender identities and new meanings of marriage. This research has contributed to the existing literature on South Asian Muslims in Britain in a number of ways. Firstly, this study examined how women, within the spaces of higher education and employment, are exercising greater agency so as to make autonomous decisions about their life options in order to generate new gender identities. Building on previous studies which concentrated on the motivational factors pushing young women to enter into higher education and employment (Ahmad, 2001; Ahmad *et al.*, 2003; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008; Dwyer and Shah, 2009), this study not

only reveals the positive impacts which higher education and work have on women's lives, but also highlights the strategies employed by these women as they resist and challenge family and community expectations. As educated and independent British South Asian Muslim women negotiate educational and employment careers, they generate new gender identities as they challenge and alter the cultural and religious expected gendered norms of South Asian Muslim womanhood within their communities. Indeed, this study demonstrates that young women's negotiations with family reflect how educational and socio-economic backgrounds, social class, as well as choice of university institutions remain prominent and determining factors aiding women to successfully embark upon their educational and employment careers. Hence, in reaching compromises with family, young women find the new spaces of education and work to be conducive to the formulation of new gender identities.

Secondly, this study has evaluated how the independence gained through the new spaces of higher education and employment, lead young British South Asian Muslim women to formulate new understandings and expectations of marriage (as institution, practice and act). As they navigate Islamic and British ideals of marriage, young women actively negotiate intertwining legal systems so as to re-work their meanings of marriage. In taking marriage to be the crux of women's negotiations, this thesis reveals marriage to be the focal sphere within which women choose to enforce newfound agency. In engaging with the existing literature on marriage in British South Asian Muslim communities (Basit, 1997; Bhopal, 1997/2009; Bradby, 1999; Macey and Beckett, 2001; Shaw, 2001; Shaw and Charsley, 2006; Gangoli et al., 2006), I reinforced the significance which marriage has in contributing to women's ethnic and religious identities. Nevertheless, the main point I underlined remains that while most of these educated young South Asian Muslim women are not actively resisting or refusing to consider marriage, many of them are attempting to re-work or re-interpret dominant ethno-religious understandings of marriage.

In highlighting the debates about the legal aspects delineating South Asian Muslim marriages in the UK and in reviewing previous work conducted on the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Islamic marriage in Britain (Poulter, 1986; Pearl and Menski, 1979/1998; Ahsan, 1995; Bano, 1999), I also evaluated young women's positionings as they negotiate intertwining legal systems (Islamic and British laws) so as to develop new perceptions and expectations of marriage through the axes of consent and choice. This study reinforces how British South Asian Muslim women's navigations between Islamic and British ideals of marriage exhibit the possibilities (gained through education) of reinterpreting Islamic precepts on marriage so as to embrace a discourse of gender equality in marriage within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain. It is hence possible for

young women to actively engage with discourses embracing the notion of equality within the Islamic marriage so as to produce new gender identities. As Brown (2006) previously showed, young Muslim women in Britain are utilising their knowledge gained through education so as to personally grapple with Islamic literature (the Qur'an, Sunna and Hadiths) in order to build a new framework which embraces gender rights as being egalitarian in Islam. Similarly, in my study, I have demonstrated that respondents are building on such theoretical discourses, and are eloquently grappling with these concepts in order to contest and construct new expectations of marriage as they re-work the gendered boundaries around talaq (Islamic divorce) and polygamy within the Islamic marriage.

The study of British South Asian Muslim women's negotiations of education, employment and marriage offers a platform for further research. Further studies could look at how women's educational careers may be affected once universities start to charge higher tuition fees for university degrees; indeed, will women find it harder to make the choice to continue on their educational paths when it is much more expensive, and will they be seen as carrying debt, and thus, be more of a burden for a future husband? Also, given some of the contradictions between the responses of married and unmarried women discussed here, it would be interesting to consider a longitudinal study on this cohort of British South Asian Muslim women graduates to find out whether their expectations of achieving professional careers, as well as altering gendered norms of marriage within their communities, were met. As for the intersection of legal frameworks (Islamic and British) and the controversies of merging both, this thesis has demonstrated some of the pitfalls young women face as they negotiate marriage through two sets of laws.

Further research could usefully reflect on the recent policy debates raised by Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 2008, about Shari'a law in the UK and the possibilities of adopting certain aspects of Shari'a law in Britain (*BBC News Online*, February 2008). This vision has animated national debates in the UK, where Dr Williams raised the point that Muslim communities in Britain could, for instance, be provided with scope to legislate marriage according to Islamic legal jurisdiction. In effect, if this were the case, British South Asian Muslim women's understandings and experiences of marriage in Britain would be grounded within different frameworks and discourses, where Muslim women's gender identities could be influenced in diverse ways. Further research could therefore examine what young Muslim women think of these debates, and how they position themselves within such discourses. This study has demonstrated the importance of new spaces for research, such as the university campus, in shaping British South Asian Muslim identities in the UK. Hopkins (2010: 157), in looking at how Muslim identities evolve on British university campuses, focuses on how the specific 'social and spatial relations' that

Muslim students experience on university campuses inform contestations and constructions of their identities. My own research provides further examples of this, including the significance of key university spaces like Islamic societies as well as other spaces of interaction for students. Further studies could specifically extend knowledge on British South Asian Muslim women's identities by examining women's gender identities within geographies of university campuses in more depth, as more women decide to enter into higher education in the future. As this thesis has demonstrated, it is spaces like higher education and employment which are leading British South Asian Muslim women to assert new gender identities; therefore, the possibilities for additional research in this field remain potent.

APPENDIX TWO

Research Topics

1. Research questions about young British South Asian Muslim women and marriage

What defines the young British Muslim woman currently in higher education or recently graduated from university?

Who? Age? Ethnicity? Single/married/engaged/cohabiting with partner? With children? Relying on family (nuclear or extended) for financial support while in full-time/part-time education? Living at home or away from home? Working part time while studying?

What does marriage mean to the young British Muslim woman in multicultural Britain?

A civil contract: legal partnership implying marital rights for spouses enforced by the state? A social institution that encourages love, support, mutual help and companionship between couples? A religious and legal contract (nikah): a contract/pledge before God? (Allah)A duty for every Muslim: marriage as a religious duty with specific gendered roles for women and men? An institution that legitimises sexual relationships and the procreation of children? Do young women take it for granted that they will marry? Are marital roles encouraged by the Prophet in Islam equal/ complementary? Do women think that traditional gendered Islamic roles in marriage have to be maintained or should they be modified to better fit the needs of modern British society?

What are the implications for young women in marrying twice (Islamic and civil secular)?

Is it always necessary to do both? Is one able to choose between one of them? Which marriage ceremony has more significance or precedence over the other? Which one is given more importance and more validity within the community and why? How are negotiations and compromises between the two forms of marriage reached and established within the angrezi shari'a (Islamic English law)?

How does gender affect perceptions/experiences of marriage in British Muslim communities?

Impact of gender differences in the approach to marriage norms and ideals in Muslim communities? How do gender differences and perceptions encourage the socialisation of Muslim women in particular ways that encourage women to remain the keepers of traditions? How are Muslim communities' social and religious expectations different for women and men? Why? To what extent do young women conform to such norms and what are the consequences of not following them?

What role does one's family/kin or community have in shaping values and ideals about marriage?

Analysis of how Muslim families educate and socialise young women in matters of marriage. To what extent do family members influence them in choice of partners? Are they given choice in

whether to get married or not? Are arranged marriages common within the family? Are they cousin marriages/transnational marriages and why? Do families pressurise young women to marry as soon as possible? To what extent/Why do kinship networks help to maintain cultural values or ideals about the Islamic marriage in Britain?

2. Research questions about young British South Asian Muslim women's identities and meanings of Muslimness and Britishness

How does one choose an identity and why? What are the implications of being both? Or actively/consciously trying to be all of them (hybridity)? Does religious identity have precedence over ethnic and national identity or vice-versa? Why? Analysis of how different identities interact with one another to form new identities. What are the roles of kinship networks, friendship networks, religious groups, community organisations or university support groups might play in reinforcing certain identities?

How does gender influence identity formation and the politics of difference in young Muslim women?

How do young women relate to the wider Muslim community in terms of gender differences? Do young women think that there may be differences between identities formed in young women and young men and why do they think they exist? How far does being a woman and a Muslim impact on young women's consciousness? What do young women think about how the rest of their community and British white society socially construct the politics of difference (between Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK)?

In what ways does the Muslim community or the family help to reinforce cultural/religious/ethnic identity?

How do different social groups/institutions such as the family, youth groups, Islamic schools/centres/societies inform young women's decisions to adopt particular identities? Is there a specific identity that cuts across social or economic class? What factors (cultural or social) contribute to reinforce certain traits of ethnic identity to draw the difference between South Asian Muslim traditions and European traditions? Are specific dress codes (like traditional Muslim Asian dresses or headscarves-hijab) significant identity markers that young Muslim women have to respect so as to be identified, both culturally and religiously, as Muslim?

How do young women negotiate between two cultures?

What strategies do young women use to negotiate between Islam and Europe? What do they consciously reject or embrace from both cultures and why? How does social context shape their choices? Is the home (personal space) different from public space (university/workplace etc)? What efforts are made or what actions are taken to negotiate between them and is it a straightforward process? Do they at times feel 'torn' between two cultures in trying to integrate or assimilate?

How have traditional and cultural notions on ethnic identities evolved from the first to the second generation of South Asian Muslims in Britain?

How do the previous generations (parents/grandparents, especially women within the family) negotiate between identities? Is there more resistance on their part to embrace and identify with the West? What differences exist between previous and new generation in terms of developing new identities? Does the previous generation struggle to maintain 'traditional' and 'cultural' Islamic values in an age of rapid social change and what effects does this have on young Muslim women?

3. Research questions about gendered social/cultural expectations of Islamic marriage and identity within South Asian Muslim communities in Britain

What role does Islam play in shaping young women's ideals of womanhood and marriage in British South Asian Muslim communities?

How important is religion in young women's daily lives? Do they at times question the orthodox or 'traditional' portrayals of womanhood in Islam? Why? To what extent do young women actively engage with Islamic principles and whether Islam is constructed not only as the need to believe in God (faith-iman) but as a legitimised code for regulating women's lives? How does the socialisation of young women construct particular cultural and religious expectations of Muslim women from their communities and why women conform?

How do young women regard gender roles and relationship within the Islamic marriage?

Do young women believe that Islam encourages or hinders equal gender relationships between men and women, or between husbands and wives or vice-versa? Should they both benefit from equal status and power relations within the household and why or how? How do young women perceive Islamic rules on divorce (talaq) and polygamous Muslim marriages in the UK? Should female (wife) repudiation still be recognised within Muslim communities and why? Should Muslim women be given more options to contract their own marriages and how/why?

How relevant are the teachings of the *Qur'an* and Islamic marriage legislation (*Shari'a*) for young Muslim women living in Britain today?

*What roles do the teachings and regulations of the *Qur'an* play in young women's upbringing and lives? Do the strict Quranic rules always apply? How are they enforced and contested? What measures are taken to ensure women adhere to the communities' religious expectations? How does the application of the *Shari'a* on the Islamic marriage differ within British South Asian Muslim communities and their country of origin? How is the nikah viewed today by Muslim women living in Britain and its importance versus the secular British civil marriage?*

To what extent could the values surrounding the *nikah* be reconciled with European notions of marriage, or to new forms of marriage such as civil partnerships or cohabitation?

How do young Muslim women regard more European partnerships such as cohabitation? How is cohabitation before marriage regarded in Muslim communities in the UK? Do young men and women have the same options to decide whether to cohabit with their partners before marriage? Are there possibilities that young women would cohabit with a boyfriend/partner before marriage? Do the Islamic values of the nikah, especially those around sexual purity and virginity prevent young women from cohabiting with a partner? How is pre-marital sex regarded by young Muslim women in a liberal society that normalises the ideal free love and sexual relationships? How do young women balance the idea of love and duty (Islamic) if they are in a relationship? To what extent do young women respect and negotiate with the 'traditional' ideals enshrined in the Qur'an and hadiths?

4. Research questions about education/paid employment and young British South Asian Muslim women's choices in respect to marriage

To what extent are young Muslim women able to enter into higher education at an age where marriage is usually contemplated as is encouraged by Islamic teachings?

How far do young Muslim women need to negotiate with family members to enter into higher education or are they encouraged to pursue their interests freely? Are they financially supported by their family while studying? Are they studying out of choice or obligation? Would they prefer marriage instead or are they able to do both simultaneously? What strategies do young women use in cases where they are not supported by their families to study and what are the incentives encouraging them to enter into higher education? Do young women think that it is easier for young men rather than for women to enter into higher education and why?

How is the pursuit of higher education by women reconciled to the more traditional notions of womanhood (marriage and motherhood) encouraged or prescribed by Islam?

To what extent does education alter or reinforce 'traditional/cultural' views young women have about Islam and marriage? How far do university life and university campuses as social spaces create specific contexts where young women navigate between traditionalism (prescribed Islamic rules) and modernity (European liberal notions)? How is religious or cultural identity maintained by young Muslim women on campus? For instance, is there a specific dress code to be respected when they are in public spaces such as university? To what extent do young women behave differently at university and at home?

How do young women view marriage as an infringement upon educational advancement/career aspirations and why?

To what extent do young women think that marriage may be an infringement on young women's options to study? How far do young women think that marriage, if imposed by family, constrains women's abilities to enter into higher education? Do they think they will be considering being just career oriented once they complete their courses at university or will marriage be given

precedence over career? Will juggling both career and marriage be an option for young women and do they believe they will have a choice in the matter?

To what extent do education and paid employment affect young women's decisions to marry or lead them to choose alternatives to marriage?

Has education affected any plans to marry? Level to which education changes young women's perceptions of what they really want as opposed to what is expected of them from the rest of the community. To what extent are young women considering alternatives to marriage such as career options/advancement/pursuing independent and personal goals?

To what extent do education and employment give young women more scope and independence to develop multiple (hybrid) identities as they negotiate between 'traditional' and 'modern' definitions/ideals of marriage?

To what extent do young educated Muslim women perceive themselves to be different from or similar to other women who are not studying/ have not studied? How and why? In what ways do young women navigate between different identities to form new ones through the education process? To what extent does education provide women with more independence to engage with religious ideals and form new opinions on what marriage is and should be? How far do they think they will have the options of living independently after their courses are finished? How far is living alone or sharing accommodation/a flat (once the courses are finished and they start working or if they are currently working) with housemates other than family members/siblings considered?

APPENDIX THREE

Interview Schedule

Education and employment: options of young British Muslim women

1. Age/ Occupation-what does your work involve? / Status/ Siblings-what do they do?
2. How is/was university life like? What particular activities/social groups were you involved in?
3. How important would you say education is to you? Are most women in your family educated?
4. Were you supported and encouraged by your family to enter into higher education or work?
5. Do you think your mum and dad have been equally influential in your aspirations or in what you wanted to do? Has there been anyone else in your family or community who has influenced you in your goals?
6. Do you think Muslim women and Muslim men in Britain have equal chances to go to university and work?
7. Did your grandmother and mother, or women in their generation, have the same opportunities to study or work? How so? What about men of their generation?
8. Do you think that education or employment influence marriage prospects for women? How so?

Identities of young British Muslim women

1. How would you define yourself?
2. How does the previous generation differ from your generation? Do you think British Muslims have kept traditions or customs?
3. Do you think that the term 'British Muslim' existed some 40-50 years ago?
4. Do you think there is a clash between traditions and modernity in Muslim communities in Britain?
5. How do you think the Muslim community helps to maintain cultural or religious traditions in Britain?

Meanings of marriage for young British Muslim women

1. How do you view marriage in Britain nowadays?
2. What are your own expectations about marriage? Do they differ from your parents'/ Have they changed intergenerationally?
3. Does religion influence your views on marriage?
4. Do you think marriage is equally important for young Muslim women and men, as compared to other groups?
5. In the British community, arranged marriages, particularly cousin marriages are viewed as taboo. Why do you think that is?
6. Do you have any concerns about such marriages?
7. What about forced marriages?
8. Are the *nikah* and the civil registration equally important to you?
9. What do you think about cohabitation before marriage?
10. What are your views on pre-marital relationships and premarital sex?
11. Could you tell me about your past experiences of relationships?

12. Do you think women and men (wives and husbands) benefit from equal status and rights in Islam?
13. In your family and community, are wives and husbands given the same rights in the household?
14. How do you feel about the status of Muslim women in relation to wife repudiation (*talaq*)?
15. What are your views on Muslim polygamous marriages?
16. What are your views on the *Qur'an* or *Shari'a* regulations or prescriptions on how women should behave?

APPENDIX FOUR

List of codes

Theme One: Education and Work

School experiences
Higher education and locality
Higher education and choice
Career choice
University and life experience
Higher education and living arrangements/ 'moving away from home'
Involvement in social groups
Islamic Societies at university (ISOC)

Emphasis on traditional subjects/careers
Importance of higher education
Importance of work
Higher education and family background
Higher education and siblings' support
Higher education and access to younger siblings
Educated women in the family
Mothers' input in daughters' education
Fathers' input in daughters' education
Reasons for parental support
Higher education/work and husbands' support
Parents' trust in daughters
Higher education and family constraints
Barriers to go into higher education
Differences in 'Asian' v/s 'Western' upbringing and education
Younger generations' attitudes to higher education
Intergenerational differences/changes of women's opportunities to education and work
Intergenerational differences/changes of men's opportunities to education and work
Women's peers who have not studied and lifestyle

Higher education and work v/s marriage
Independence v/s marriage
Higher education and marriage plans/prospects
Higher education and gender differences
Higher education and community beliefs
Higher education and women's independence
Higher education and financial security
Higher education and evolution of identities
Work and social class
Sorting out a career before marriage

Theme Two: Identity

Citizenship identity
Religious identity
Ethnic identity
Cultural identity
Multiple identities
Precedence of identities
Religious identity and pride
'British Muslim': a new term
Identity and stereotype/labels
Identity and community
Identity and locality
Identity and pressure to conform

Migration and integration
Migration and older generation
Who am I?
What makes me British?
What makes me Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi?
What makes me Muslim?
Situational/contextual identities
Maintaining cultural/ethnic and religious identities
Identity and language
Identity and hijab
Hijab and 'Muslimness'
Difference and hijab
Identity and clothing
Identity and language/food

Public perception of ethnic/religious/cultural identities
Identity stereotyping and older generation
Older generations' expressions of identities
Younger generations' expressions of identities
Intergenerational perceptions of identity for older v/s younger generations
Intergenerational clashes between older v/s younger generations
Having 'different' lives
University and 'British side'
Home and 'traditional side'
'Liberal Pakistan' v/s 'Conservative Britain'
Western v/s Pakistani
Meanings of 'modern'
Meanings of 'traditional'
'Stuck' between two cultures
Clash of identities
Modernity v/s Traditional
Identity and extremism

Theme Three: Marriage

Perceptions of marriage in Britain
Change in marriage perceptions in Britain
Marriage as partnership
Choice of marriage partner
Meanings of marriage for young women
Expectations of marriage for young women
Marriage: a piece of paper in Britain
Intergenerational changes in expectations of marriage

Marriage and age
Marriage and ethnicity
Marriage and culture
Marriage and commitment
Marriage and parental expectations
Marriage and divorce rates
Choice in marriage and higher education
Marriage and in-laws
Marriage and community expectations
Marrying 'in' and 'out'
Marriage and social status
Social class and marriage options/choices

Dating
Engagements
Views on love marriage
Experiences of love marriage
Views on arranged marriage
Experiences of arranged marriage
Arranged marriage and choice/consent
Arranged marriage and evolution
Love marriage v/s arranged marriage
Forced marriage
Forced marriage in Britain
Forced marriage and education
Distinction between arranged and forced marriage
Grey area in arranged v/s forced marriage
Views on transnational marriage
Experiences of transnational marriage
Transnational marriage and culture
Views on cousin marriage
Experiences of cousin marriage
Cousin marriage and Islam
Cousin marriage and love

Meaning of the nikah
Meaning of civil registration

Importance of the nikah
Importance of civil registration
Reasons for doing nikah and civil registration
Priority of the nikah over civil registration
Mahr and women's views

Views on cohabitation
Reasons for cohabitation
Cohabitation and community
Cohabitation and Islam
Cohabitation and education
Cohabitation and non-Muslims
Cohabitation and sex
Pre-marital sex and women's views
Pre-marital sex and community
Pre-marital sex and younger generations
Boyfriends and relationships
Women's relationships: reputation and parents
Divorce in South Asian Muslim communities
Women's views on divorce

Theme Four: Islam

Hijab and women's choice
Hijab and identity
Hijab and freedom
Hijab and modesty
Hijab and choice
Hijab and fashion
Why wear the hijab?
Hijab and culture
Hijab and the 'good Muslim girl' view
Hijab as tool
Media and Muslim women

Islam and media
Shari'a and media
Post September 11
Expressions of Islam: Younger v/s Older generations
Meanings of Islam for young women
Interpreting Islam
Practising Islam
Islam and Orthodoxy
Muslims 'divided' in Britain

Islam and marriage
Marrying a Muslim

Marriage and conversion to Islam
Sunni-Shia inter-marriage
Islam and Sexuality
Women's status in Islam
Men and Islam
Wives' rights in Islam
Women's views on mahr
Equal rights/status in Islam
Islam and women's 'liberation'
Stereotype of 'oppressed' Muslim women
Religion v/s Culture
Religion as justification to patriarchy/culture

Divorce in Islam
Women's views on female repudiation
Legal difficulties of Islamic divorce/English divorce
Importance of Islamic divorce
Women's views on polygamy
Reasons for polygamy
Conditions for polygamy
Polygamy that works
Polygamy in Britain

Islam and context
Reading the Quran
Shari'a law in the UK
Shari'a law and stereotypes

Theme Five: Gender

Stereotype of the 'educated girl'
'Proper Muslim girl'
Behaviour codes for women
Gender and clothing
Women's clothing and community codes
Men in the community
'Shame in the family'
Gender and marriage
Gender and community constraints
Gender and household roles
Gender roles and older generation's expectations
Gender differences and dating
Gender and virginity before marriage
Gender and transnational marriage
Intergenerational changes in gender roles (household)
Women's position in the family
Women's experiences of roles in the family

Women and honour

Gender and higher education

Older generation's reactions to girls' v/s boys' educational achievements

An educated wife: a 'liability'? / Women and 'too much education'

APPENDIX FIVE

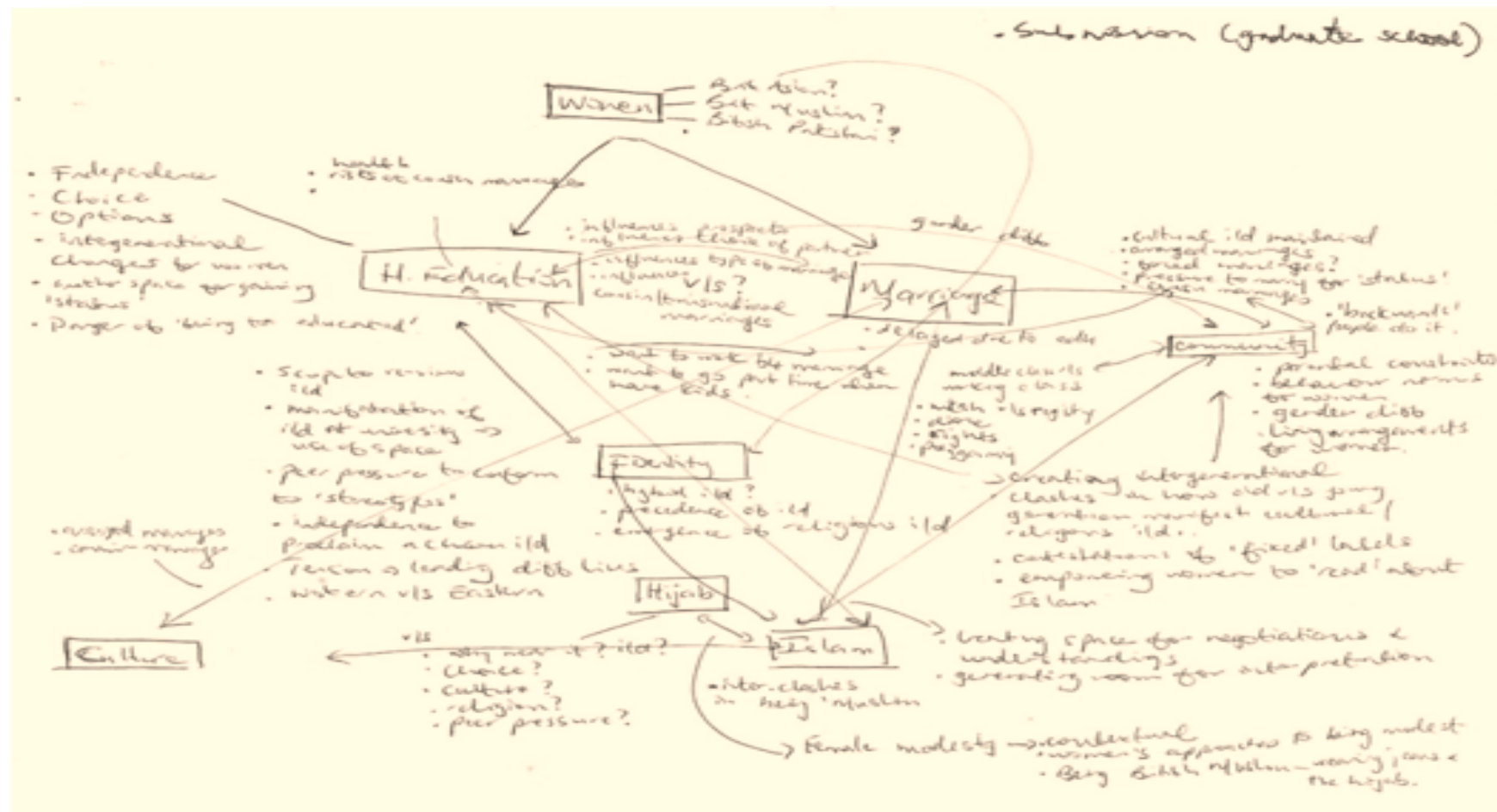
Coded Theme: Higher Education

This is an example of how I coded the theme 'Higher Education' using the software Nvivo8; I also provide an example of a coded interview transcript from the theme 'Higher Education':

Tree Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Crea
- Higher Education	0	0	27/0
Name	Sources	Reference	
Higher Education	0	0	
Differences in 'Asian' versus 'Western' upbringing and e	0	0	
Younger generations' attitudes to higher education	0	0	
Islamic Societies at university (ISOC)	1	1	
Importance of work	1	1	
Emphasis on traditional subjects-careers	2	2	
Higher education and family background	2	2	
Higher education-work and husbands' support	2	2	
Sorting out a career before marriage	2	2	
Women's peers who have not studied and lifestyle	3	3	
Independence versus marriage	3	3	
Higher education and financial security	3	3	
Higher Education and Locality	3	3	
Higher education and community beliefs	6	9	
Higher education and siblings' support	10	13	
Higher education and family constraints	10	19	
Higher education and women's independence	10	17	
Work and social class	11	11	
Fathers' input in daughters' education	12	15	
Higher education and access to younger siblings	13	18	
Higher Education & Choice	15	24	
Mothers' input in daughters' education	15	25	
Career Choice	17	28	
High School Experiences	21	29	
University & Life Experience	21	27	
Higher education and work versus marriage	23	51	
Involvement in social groups	24	29	
Reasons for parental support	25	44	
Intergenerational differences-changes of men's opportu	25	27	
Higher education and living arrangements - 'moving awa	26	56	
Higher education and evolution of identities	26	38	
Intergenerational differences-changes of women's oppor	28	35	
Educated women in the family	29	39	
Higher education and marriage plans and prospects	29	48	
Importance of higher education	30	44	
Higher education and gender differences	30	54	
+ Marriage	0	0	27/0
+ Identity	0	0	27/0
+ Gender	0	0	27/0
+ Islam	0	0	27/0

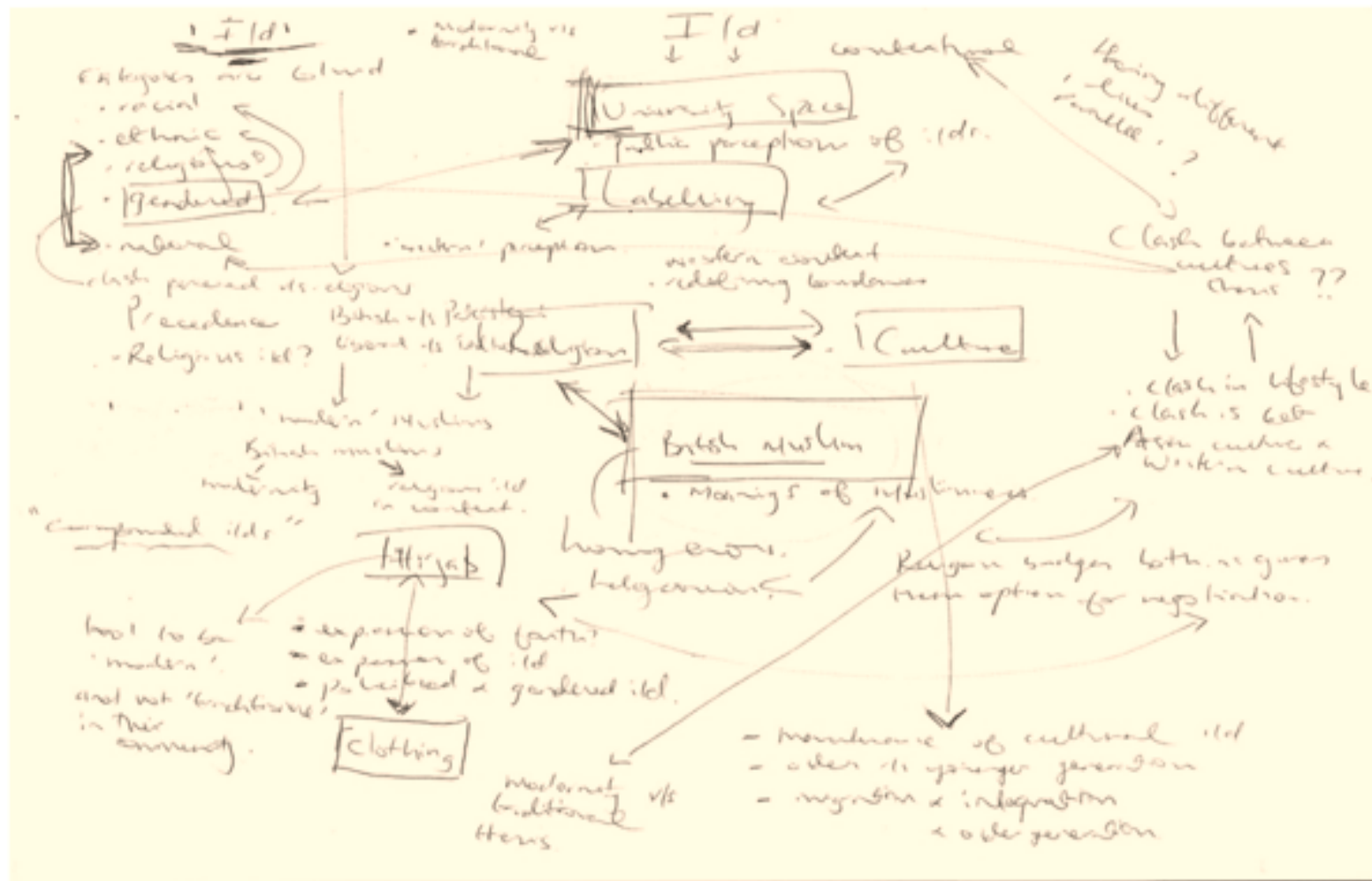
APPENDIX SEVEN – Mind Maps



Mind Map 1: Thesis Outline.



Mind Map 2: Higher Education/Employment/Identity (Chapter Four).





Mind Map 4: Marriage (Chapter Six).

APPENDIX EIGHT

Consent to participate in a research study

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title: Young British South Asian Muslim women: marriage and identity

Supervisor: Dr Claire Dwyer, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UCL. Tel: 0207 679 5526; Email: c.dwyer@geog.ac.uk.

Researcher: Samia Abdool Raman, PhD student, UCL. Tel: 07973512771; Email: s.raman@ucl.ac.uk

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. I hope to gain an understanding how young Muslim women in Britain view marriage and identity. I also aim to understand the ways in which education and employment prospects influence young women's aspirations for the future. I am interested in how young women perceive marriage in their community, and in British society at large. I am also particularly interested in how Islamic values shape marriage patterns in British Muslim communities, and how this may impact on ethnic practices and identities.

This project is intended to produce information for a doctoral thesis.

Procedures

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in a number of ways in this nine-month study:

- You will be asked to attend an informal group discussion. During this time, group members may actively talk about their perceptions, views and experiences of marriage and identity and education. **With all the group members' permission, I will tape record the discussion.**
- You will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview during which time I will ask you about your experiences or views on marriage in your community and your marriage options. I will also ask you about your views on Muslim marriages, and the relevance or importance of religion and culture in your daily life, and your community at large. In addition, I will ask you about your educational aims and career aspirations, and how you think these may influence your future goals. I will

also ask you how these factors have influenced your sense of self. The interview will take approximately two to two and a half hours. **With your permission, I will tape record your interview.**

Risks

There are no risks to you for participation in this study.

Participant's Initials: _____

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you for participation in this study but you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences of higher education, your future hopes and concerns, as well as your marriage options. The project will also contribute to debates on the ways in which young South Asian Muslim women are negotiating marriage and educational avenues in Britain.

Confidentiality

Any information you give will be held as strictly confidential. Your name or any identifying characteristics will not be used in any way. I will not give this information to anyone.

Costs/Compensation

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort that is required in completing the procedure described above.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind about being in the study and withdraw after the survey has started. Your refusal to participate will not affect you in any way. **During the interview and focus groups you may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.**

Do you want to be contacted with findings from the study?

If yes, please tell us the best way to contact you:

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Questions

If you have any questions, please ask me.

Consent

Your signature will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of participant _____ date _____

Signature of researcher _____ date _____

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

APPENDIX NINE

Recruitment Pamphlet

PhD Research study: British South Asian Muslim women, marriage and identities in Britain

Volunteers needed!!!

The study involves young British South Asian Muslim women and their perceptions, experiences or views on marriage, identities and Islam in multicultural Britain. The research is anonymous and strictly confidential. The data is used solely for the PhD thesis.

All that is required is an informal interview, more like a conversation but really fun! :)

We could have it over coffee or lunch.

If you are interested to participate and voice out your opinions, then this is your chance!!! If you think of anyone who would be happy to participate, I would appreciate if you would forward this email.

I can be contacted on s.raman@ucl.ac.uk

Cheers!

Samia Raman
PhD researcher,
University College London

GLOSSARY

Angrezi Shari'a: Term used to define the fusion of Shari'a and English law

Biradari: Group of kin playing significant role in maintaining social relations within a community

Burka: An all-enveloping loose body length cloak, including a head scarf covering

Duppata: Scarf worn around the neck accompanying the salwar kameez

Hadith and Sunna: Islamic principles based on the deeds and actions of Prophet Mohammad

Hijab: Headscarf covering the hair, ears and neck

Imam: Worship leader of mosque or Muslim community

Izzat: Concept of honour in South Asian communities

Jilbab: An all-enveloping loose body length cloak

Mahr: Bridal gift (Islamic marriage)

Nikah: Islamic marriage

Nikah-Nama: Islamic marriage certificate

Niqab: An all-enveloping loose body length cloak, including a head covering scarf and a face cover, exposing just the eyes

Mahr: Bridal gift as stipulated in Islamic law

Purdah: Concept of seclusion of women in private spaces

Shari'a: Islamic law/Muslim Personal Law

Salwar Kameez: Outfit comprising trousers and top, originating from South Asia

Qur'an: Holy text enshrining Islamic religious precepts and law

Rishta: Match

Rukhsati: Bride-leaving ceremony (from parents' to husband's house)

Talaq: Islamic divorce

Ulama: Islamic jurists

Ummah: Concept of universal Muslim community

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